

THE KENT COUNTY NEWS: A HISTORY AND AN ERA,
1950-1980

by
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis focuses first on the history of the Kent County News, and second on how the paper covered the problems and pressures that an urbanized twentieth century brought to a rural Eastern Shore Maryland county from 1950 to 1980.

The Kent County News is a weekly newspaper -- the only local paper for the people of Kent County, Maryland. Its roots are in one of the nation's oldest newspapers, the Chestertown Spy, established in 1793. The history of the Kent County News includes long editorial tenures which spanned both generations of families and myriad changes in technology, content and ownership. The past thirty years brought a particularly large number of changes in content and administration to the Kent County News.

This study also gives special attention to how the Kent County News covered three issues: the building of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and other attempts to span the Bay;

the advent of zoning regulations in the county; and the possibility of a nuclear power plant being located in the county. Using the complete files of the Kent County News housed in the Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore, Maryland, every issue of the paper from 1950 to 1980 was examined for information on these three issues. Other material used in this study included interviews with editors of the Kent County News, secondary source material on country weeklies and Maryland, and Maryland state publications.

This study has shown that over the years the Kent County News has presented an intimate picture of life in Kent County. In the last thirty years, as the county has faced the pressures of increased urbanization and as the paper experienced changes in design, content and ownership, the paper has become a staunch publicist for the values of small-town life. The paper has also been an educator, and an important force in promoting community consciousness and harmony.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Kent County News is the only local newspaper for the 16,500 people living in Kent County,¹ one of the nine counties on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Claiming descent from the Chestertown Spy, first published in 1793, the Kent County News uses as its motto, "A Direct Descendant of the Chestertown Spy."

The purpose of this study is first, to outline the history of the Kent County News, and second, to show how this country weekly depicted the problems and pressures brought by an urbanized twentieth century to a rural community accustomed to stability and an intimate, provincial atmosphere for more than three hundred years. This study concentrates on the newspaper's contents during the thirty years between 1950 and 1980. The year 1950 was chosen as a starting point because at that time the Chesapeake Bay was being bridged by a

¹Department of Economic and Community Development, Community and Economic Inventory- Kent County, Maryland (Annapolis: Department of Economic and Community Development, 1977).

colossal span that had been discussed and debated for more than fifty years. The Bridge was completed in July of 1952, and the twentieth century arrived literally overnight on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

When the first cars rolled across the Bridge, they brought social change that had occurred in much of the rest of the United States fifty years before. Commager called the years surrounding the turn of the century "the watershed" of American history.² According to him, the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century saw the erosion of traditional values and mores of identification. The processes of industrialization and urbanization clouded over the importance of the individual in American life. The emergence of a national economy undermined faith in local communities to work out their own problems. European immigrants flooded the land and cultural identity changed due to the rise of alien philosophies, intellectual currents, and the new found internationalism of the United States.³ With the Bridge came immigrants of another kind to the Eastern Shore: Summer vacationers, land speculators, housing contractors, businessmen, restauraners, boaters, and sightseers. They brought with them the pressures of urbanization.

This study focuses on the Kent County News' coverage of the pressures that this quick introduction of the twentieth

²Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

³Ibid.

century brought to the county. Particular attention has been given to three important issues: the building of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and subsequent attempts to construct other spans across the Bay; the development of zoning laws in the county; and the fight over the location of a nuclear power plant in the county.

Every edition of the Kent County News from 1950 to 1980 has been examined for information concerning those three issues. Data on length, placement, and frequency of articles and editorials dealing with the three issues -- bridge construction, zoning and nuclear power -- was collected for that time period. Layout, design, advertising, and news and editorial comment was also studied for changes over the thirty year period. Personal interviews with William B. Usilton III, editor emeritus, and H. Hurtt Deringer, present editor, supplemented information extracted from the paper.

A review of the literature of journalism history revealed little material on the role of weekly newspapers, particularly those in Maryland. Invaluable to any research in American journalism are the works of Willard G. Bleyer, 1927,⁴ Frank L. Mott, 1950,⁵ and Edwin Emery, 1962.⁶ All three are encyclopedic studies of the complete history of American journalism

⁴Willard G. Bleyer, Main Currents in the History of American Journalism (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1927).

⁵Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950).

⁶Edwin Emery, The Press and America- An Interpretive History of Journalism (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1962).

from the colonial period up to the time each was published, but none gave a good account of the role of the weekly newspaper. Similarly, Alfred McClung Lee's comprehensive study of American newspapers published in 1937 limited discussion of the role of weekly newspapers to a glance at weekly editions of dailies.⁷

Many states have comprehensive studies of their journalistic endeavors; Maryland does not.⁸ These studies highlight state and national history by presenting the history of newspapers and their editors. Unfortunately, the role of the weekly newspaper receives little attention in these studies.

Any study of a rural newspaper such as the Kent County News cannot be started, however, without a look at works by historians, sociologists and journalists on contents and production of weeklies. Allen's venerable book on country journalism described methods for presenting news, analyzing news and running the business end of the paper.⁹ Byerly

⁷ Alfred McClung Lee, The Daily Newspaper in America (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937).

⁸ Warren J. Brier and Nathan B. Blumberg, A Century of Montana Journalism (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Co., 1971); Loius Turner Griffith and John Erwin Talmadge, Georgia Journalism 1763-1950 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1951); Edward C. Kemble, A History of California Newspapers 1846-1858 (Sacramento: Sacramento Union, 1858; reprint ed. with a forward by Helen Harding Bretnor, Los Gatos: The Talisman Press, 1962); Richard E. Lingenfelter, The Newspapers of Nevada- A History and Bibliography (San Francisco: John Howel Books, 1964); George S. Turnbull, History of Oregon Newspapers (Portland: Binfords & Mort., 1939), and others.

⁹ Charles Laurel Allen, Country Journalism (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1928).

stressed basic principles of advertising, printing, circulation and management, and gave advice on acquiring ownership of a weekly paper.¹⁰ Barnhart did much the same.¹¹ All three were valuable background reading for this study because they presented information on the mechanics of operating weekly newspapers.

Sim's concern over the possible extinction of the community press led him to study the viability of the medium, changes that may take place, and prospects for the future.¹² His book was useful because it stressed the contemporary treatment of the rural newspaper field, the changing character of American society, and the impact of new technology.

From a more strictly sociological approach, Janowitz studied the community press within the confines of a specific section of the urban metropolis -- namely the suburbs or a community section of the city.¹³ Although Janowitz worked within the framework of an urban and suburban setting and not a rural one, his insights and conclusions were helpful to the study of rural journalism because he dealt with the concerns of a small, intimate community.

¹⁰Kenneth R. Byerly, Community Journalism (Philadelphia: Chilton Co., 1961).

¹¹Thomas F. Barnhart, Weekly Newspaper Management (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1936).

¹²John Cameron Sim, The Grass Roots Press: America's Community Newspapers (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1969).

¹³Morris Janowitz, The Community Press in an Urban Setting, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

Several content analyses helped to present a picture of the typical country weekly, and to show that the Kent County News has fitted into the mainstream of rural newspapers. Malcolm MacDonald Willey was a pioneer in the quantitative methodology of studying rural newspaper content. In his seminal content analysis of rural Connecticut newspapers, Willey analyzed the types of reading matter in country newspapers, and went on to make conclusions about the role and function of a country newspaper in the socialization process of an area.¹⁴ He concluded that the rural newspaper has the ability to create community solidarity and to meet the needs of its relatively homogenous constituency.¹⁵

On a smaller scale Reuss did a content analysis of twelve issues of twenty Virginia weeklies.¹⁶ He found that the community weekly was primarily a business enterprise even though the weekly served the community as a medium for the communication of opinions, news of broad human interest, and informative news of institutions and organizations.

Rural community life was of necessity a topic for thought and investigation in this study. Riley, in a methodological essay, saw the country newspaper as an overlooked

¹⁴Malcolm MacDonald Willey, The Country Newspaper: A Study of Socialization and Newspaper Content (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Carl F. Reuss, "Content of the Country Weekly," Rural Sociology 4 (Winter 1939): 335.

archive for the investigation of rural community life.¹⁷ He stated that,

. . . the student of rural and town life need not confine himself so strictly . . . to histories and public records; his methods need not be limited to questionnaires, or time budgets, or 'sympathetic introspection.' There is a supplement to these data and these methods which is too often overlooked: the complete files of the weekly newspaper in the country library would seem to be a source of primary importance to the sociologist investigating many aspects of community life.¹⁸

Clark contended that "the most literate chronicle of rural progress is to be found in the weekly newspaper."¹⁹ He did not try to undertake a statistical study of rural papers but attempted to preserve the spirit of the editor's work. He allowed the editors to speak for themselves "instead of using an inanimate meter rule on the amount of space they gave to various subjects."²⁰ Clark's look at the "wholesome informality" of the country weekly and his view of it as a "common man's institution" was valuable for this study because it expressed how the personal, intimate nature of rural journalism was a pervasive and fundamental aspect of its existence.

As an articulate spokesman for rural journalism, Clark defended the country paper this way:

¹⁷John Winchell Riley, Jr., "The Country Weekly as a Sociological Source," American Sociological Review 3 (February 1938): 39-46.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁹Thomas D. Clark, The Southern Country Editor (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1948).

²⁰Ibid., p. 1, 2.

More sophisticated scholars in the history of journalism have dismissed the country paper in the shortest possible space. Unfortunately this plain little journal often has been damned for its prostitution to proprietary medicine companies and for using stereotyped patent sides. Although much of this adverse criticism is deserved, the country journal has been far more virtuous than such an attitude would indicate. Its pages tell a rich²¹ human story which can be duplicated nowhere else.

Among useful concepts presented in Steiner's general study of the rural press was his statement that the country weekly cannot regale its readers with sensationalism but must face the weekly challenge of presenting local news in an interesting and informative fashion.²² Rogers, in his study on the role of the weekly press, reiterated Steiner's conclusion, and stated that the country weekly presented a narrative of the community with an eye toward preserving the status quo.²³

Schramm and Ludwig's exhaustive quantitative study of community weeklies analyzed among other things the amount of time readers spent on each page, if they read above or below the fold, and how weeklies competed with other mass media outlets. They concluded that the weekly knits its readers together "with the little understories which are the essence of both communication and community."²⁴ The study gave some

²¹Ibid., p. 3.

²²Jesse F. Steiner, "The Rural Press," American Journal of Sociology 33 (November 1927): 412-23.

²³Charles E. Rogers, "The Role of the Weekly Newspaper," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 219 (January 1942): 151-57.

²⁴Wilbur Schramm and Merritt Ludwig, "The Weekly Newspaper and Its Readers," Journalism Quarterly 28 (Summer 1951): 301-14.

insight into the purpose and intimacy of the country weekly and provided information about readers of country weeklies.

Studies on rural sociology often have looked at the country paper. Atherton, Hayes, Nelson, and Vidich and Bensman all examined the role of the rural paper in the small town from a sociologist's point of view.²⁵ The authors were concerned with how the papers acted as a part of the socialization process, or how the papers bound a community together. These studies were especially important in attempting to gauge the influence of the Kent County News on the community.

All of the literature cited has led to the conclusion that country weeklies are too often maligned and too often overlooked in journalism history. Their role in the community is too often seen by outsiders as provincial and backward. Also, the omission of information on Maryland weeklies suggested the need for this study.

Although Maryland does not have a statewide history of journalism, some material was found on Kent County and Eastern Shore weekly newspapers. In his study of colonial printing in Maryland, Wroth covered the short stay of John Peter Zenger in Chestertown, the county seat of Kent County.²⁶ Zenger

²⁵ Louis Atherton, Main Street on the Middle Border (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperbacks, 1966); Wayland I. Hayes, The Small Community Looks Ahead (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1947); Lowrey Nelson, Rural Sociology (New York: American Book Co., 1948); Arthur J. Vidich and Joseph Bensman, Small Town in Mass Society: Class, Power and Religion in a Rural Community (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1960).

²⁶ Lawrence C. Wroth, A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland 1686-1776 (Baltimore: Typothetae of Baltimore, 1922).

apparently applied for citizenship in Maryland in 1720, and was then awarded a contract to print the proceedings of the Maryland General Assembly. He ran his press in a small shop in Chestertown for about a year. No Maryland imprints with his name remain in existence however.

Winchester and Webb, in 1905, did research on Maryland newspapers and their editors.²⁷ Biographical information about editors of the Kent County News and its forerunners was included in their study, and was used in this paper.

Goodwin included a chapter on country newspapers in his 1944 sociological study of the Eastern Shore of Maryland.²⁸ He analyzed one thousand copies of Eastern Shore newspapers for local news content, the number of names, circulation statistics, ownership and age, sources of news, and editor's backgrounds. He concluded that the country weekly was a "placid mirror of a stable, continuous, understandable round of life and friends and neighbors. . ."²⁹ Although dated, the study was valuable as an overview of Eastern Shore weeklies.

Myers, in 1931, wrote an M.A. thesis at the University of Maryland on Maryland newspapers in the eighteenth century

²⁷Paul Winchester and Frank D. Webb, Newspapers and Newspaper Men of Maryland (Baltimore: Frank L. Sibley & Co., 1905).

²⁸Frank Goodwin, "A Study of Personal and Social Organization: An Explorative Survey of the Eastern Shore of Maryland," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1944).

²⁹Ibid., p. 129.

which provided historical background for this study.³⁰

Mullikin's history of the Star Democrat of Easton, Maryland, is the only history of a Maryland weekly.³¹ Mullikin's work covered changes in management, content and design of the paper from 1800 to 1950, and also looked at politics and personalities of the Easton area. It provided a model for this study.

Usilton's history of Kent County contained some information about the county's newspapers but was more valuable as a chronicle of the development of Kent County. Most of the book is a compendium of names and places. Its value lies in its anecdotal treatment of county life as seen through the eyes of a native.³²

Additional information on Kent County was found in Carl Bode's Maryland- A Bicentennial History, Charles Clark's The Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia, Donald Dozer's Portrait of the Free State: A History of Maryland, Hulbert Footner's Rivers of the Eastern Shore, George A. Hanson's Old Kent, The Eastern Shore of Maryland, J. Thomas Scharf's History of Maryland from the Earliest Period to the Present, and Richard Walsh and William Lloyd Fox's Maryland: A History 1632-1974. Some of these publications, namely those of Dozer, and Walsh and Fox, besides being factual accounts of

³⁰Gibbs Myers, "Maryland Newspapers in the 18th Century," (M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 1931).

³¹James C. Mullikin, Story of the Easton Star Democrat (Easton: Easton Publishing Co. and the Star Democrat, 1949).

³²Frederick G. Usilton, The History of Kent County 1630-1916 (Chestertown: Kent Publishing Company, 1916).

Maryland's history, gave an indication of the changes brought by the Eastern Shore's quick introduction to the twentieth century. Boyd Gibbons' Wye Island was an incisive examination of urbanization and the pressures it wrought on the Eastern Shore. State publications, especially those from the State Planning Department and the Department of Natural Resources, provided background for understanding stories in the Kent County News and presented a picture of development on the Shore.

CHAPTER II

THE EASTERN SHORE AND KENT COUNTY

From atop the Chesapeake Bay Bridge the Eastern Shore of Maryland spreads out as flat as the eye can see. The horizon is a thin steady line twenty miles distant on a clear day. Another twenty miles, beyond the horizon, is Delaware and the Atlantic Ocean. The nine counties of the Eastern Shore are part of a tri-state peninsula known as the Delmarva Peninsula. Included in this area, along with the Maryland counties, are two counties of Virginia, and the whole state of Delaware.

A land that rarely rises fifty feet above sea level, the Eastern Shore is an area rich in food for the body and the mind. Seafood is a multi-million dollar a year business, and fresh catches are shipped daily to points across the nation. Tons of melons, tomatoes, corn, cucumbers, peaches and other produce are canned or sold fresh at roadside stands and supermarkets. Signs on low-slung roofs of Eastern Shore chicken houses claim 100,000 broilers produced per year in a single house alone. Federally inspected slaughter of chickens on the

Delmarva peninsula totaled almost 400 million in 1980.³³

The Shore, as it is known by most Marylanders, is also a land rich in history. Susquehannock, Ozinie, Choptank, Nanticoke, and Tockwogh Indians lived on the land leaving behind shell mounds, implements and village sites for future archeologists to study. In his journals written while sailing up the Chesapeake Bay, Captain John Smith said,

. . . Within is a country that may have the prerogative over the most pleasant places known, for large and pleasant navigable rivers, heaven and earth never agreed better to frame a place for man's habitation . . .³⁴

The Shore is a land of contrasts. Wealth lies next to poverty. The ancestors of many Shoremen came from the west coast of England. Huge land grants of one thousand acres and more were made to the wealthier people, although smaller grants of one hundred acres or less to small farmers were the norm. Great sums of money were made before the Revolution by shipping tobacco back to the mother country. Many of the large estates still stand today, owned by retired executives. Talbot County, Maryland, thirty miles south of Kent County, is reputed to have more millionaires per square mile than any other county in the United States.³⁵ Yet the Shore is also a poor land where many people live in poverty. Caroline

³³ Maryland Delaware Crop Reporting Service, Delmarva Annual Summary (U.S. Department of Agriculture in Cooperation with Maryland and Delaware Depts. of Agriculture, 1980.)

³⁴ Captain John Smith, The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles (Glasgow: James McLehose, 1907), pp. 44-45.

³⁵ Delmarva Advisory Council, "Overall Economic Development Program: Delmarva Peninsula." (Delmarva Advisory Council, 1967.)

County which lies directly to the west of Talbot County, had a median family income in 1960 of only \$3,875, less than 70 percent of the national average.³⁶

The Shore historically has been a place of racial tension. Slavery was a widespread institution. In Chestertown, from 1806 to 1860, no black person was allowed on the street without a permit after 10 P.M.³⁷ Lynchings occurred on the Shore as late as 1933 and many newspapers of the early twentieth century failed to note that blacks even existed.³⁸ The city of Cambridge erupted in gunfire and violence in the summer of 1967 over the segregationist policies of the area.

Although the social structure of the Shore embraces individuals from the deprived to the well-to-do, its esprit de corps runs this gamut. Its foundation is built of independence, community spirit, and conservatism. Some writers say the Shore is not really a place but a way of life, an ephemeral feeling.³⁹ Most historians, sociologists, and others writing about the Shore character use adjectives such as independent, insular, relaxed, anti-progressive, and provincial. Carey B. Singleton wrote that:

. . . isolation has produced a homogenous culture that is deep rooted and is reflected in the attitude

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Earl Arnett, "Chestertown, a Tarnished Gem, is a Little Too Proud of Past," Baltimore Sun (October 4, 1974): B1, B4.

³⁸ Boyd Gibbons, Wye Island (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 149.

³⁹ Goodwin, "An Explorative Survey of the Eastern Shore," p. 1, and Dozer.

of the people, thus an air of provincialism has developed that has been carried over from the colonial days to the present time. Self-sufficiency and a reluctance to accept outside ideas and changes have resulted from the . . . remoteness and long isolation from the rest of the nation.⁴⁰

Evidence of the Shoremen's independent nature is found in the fact that between 1776 and 1851, residents of the Eastern Shore tried five times to secede or to establish their right to secede from the rest of the state.⁴¹ An attempt was made as late as 1973 when state senator Robert Bauman introduced in Annapolis a "Statehood for the Eastern Shore Bill."

The unhurried, peaceful and tranquil life on the Eastern Shore is the mainstay of Shore living.⁴² Even though bounded by vast urban centers to the north and west, the Shore has retained its rural, maritime character. The accident of geography isolated the Eastern Shore, and only in the last thirty years since it has been tethered to the rest of Maryland by the umbilical Bay Bridge, has the Shore experienced marked growth and change.

Two hundred and eighty four square miles of the upper Eastern Shore is known as Kent County. Geographers define

⁴⁰Carey B. Singleton, "An Evolution of Land Use in Kent County, Maryland." (MA Thesis, University of Maryland, 1953), p. 8.

⁴¹Carl Bode, Maryland: A Bicentennial History (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1978), p. 75.

⁴²See Donald Dozer, Portrait of the Free State: A History of Maryland (Cambridge, Md.: Tidewater Publishers, 1976); and Ted Giles, East of the Bay (Easton, Md.: Easton Publishing Company, 1964).

the county as a peninsula -- bounded to the north by the Sassafras River, to the west by the Chesapeake Bay, to the south by the Chester River, and anchored to the east by Delaware.

Like the rest of the Eastern Shore, Kent County has a close association with the water. Its 209 mile-around shoreline⁴³ is made up of rivers, creeks, bights, bays, and coves -- a haven for wildlife, fish, homeowners who seek peace, and watermen who tong for oysters and set stake nets into the green current. However, even though practically surrounded by water, Kent's economy is agricultural. Kent County ranks first in the state of Maryland in the proportion of farmland area,⁴⁴ and almost 80 percent of its total land area is termed farmland.⁴⁵

Kent County is the second oldest county in Maryland, first being referred to as a county in 1642. Its population has remained remarkably stable over the last 180 years. In 1800 Kent's population was almost twelve thousand.⁴⁶ Today its pop-

⁴³Robert L. Swain, Jr., "Kent County," in Charles Clark, The Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1950), p. 917.

⁴⁴Maryland State Planning Department, The Counties of Maryland and Baltimore City - Their Origin, Growth and Development (Annapolis: Department of Planning, 1968), p. 19.

⁴⁵Department of Economic and Community Development, Community and Economic Inventory- Kent County, Maryland, 1977.

⁴⁶Maryland State Planning Commission, "Population of Maryland 1790-1930," Publication no. 3, 1934.

ulation has risen only by 4,500 to about 16,500.⁴⁷ Over the same period, the Eastern Shore's population has risen from 108,000⁴⁸ to 257,000,⁴⁹ and that of Maryland from 342,000⁵⁰ to almost four million.⁵¹

Kent County is governed by three commissioners, elected at large for four year terms. Registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans almost two to one.⁵² The median household income is \$12,966, compared with \$19,179 for Maryland and \$17,924 for the United States.⁵³ The unemployment rate of 8.4 percent is consistent with the Shore's rate of 8.6 percent.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Department of Economic and Community Development, Community and Economic Inventory-Kent County Maryland, 1977.

⁴⁸ Maryland State Planning Commission, Publication no. 3, 1934.

⁴⁹ Maryland State Planning Department, Maryland Population 1930-1970 By Election Districts, Cities and Towns, Publication no. 171, August 1971.

⁵⁰ Maryland State Planning Commission, Publication no. 3, 1934.

⁵¹ Maryland State Planning Department, Publication no. 171, August 1971.

⁵² State Administrative Board of Election Laws, "General Election Results and Voter Turnout Statistics," (Annapolis: State Administrative Board of Election Laws, Nov. 4, 1980), p. 16.

⁵³ Department of Economic and Community Development, Brief Industrial Facts- Kent County Maryland, (Annapolis: Department of Economic and Community Development, 1981).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Although the economy is agricultural, there are small industries. Campbell's Soup Company employs about 500 people in chicken and tomato processing, Tenneco Chemical Company employs 67, Rock Shirt Manufacturing employs 72, while two concrete block manufacturers employ a combined total of about 175.⁵⁵

The county planning commission discourages "obnoxious industries" from locating in the area -- those that pollute water and air -- by seeking out small, light industry better suited to the rural quality of the area. Obnoxious industries such as oil refineries, steel mills, large chemical plants and deep water ports would "offset the desirability of the county for other purposes" such as agriculture and recreation.⁵⁶ According to planning objectives, the county must remain open, beautiful and above all, rural.⁵⁷

Kent County has a total of eight public schools: four elementary, one elementary and middle school combined, two middle schools, and one high school. Combined, these schools serve about thirty-five hundred Kent students, 30 percent of whom continue their education after high school. There are

⁵⁵Department of Economic and Community Development, Community and Economic Inventory- Kent County, Maryland, 1977. p. 13, 14.

⁵⁶Kent County Planning Commission, The Comprehensive Plan for Kent County Maryland, vol. 2 (Chestertown: Kent County Planning Commission, 1974), p. 10, 11.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 3.

two private elementary schools in the county with a total enrollment of 178.⁵⁸

Recreation is abundant in many forms across the county. There are thirty county-owned public landings on rivers, creeks and ponds within the county, many with boat launching facilities and docks.⁵⁹ Sailing regattas fill weekend schedules throughout the summer. Hunting is second only to agriculture in the amount of money it brings into the county.⁶⁰ More than 200,000 Canada geese winter in the county along with other species of waterfowl.

Chestertown, a town of 3,436, is the county seat of Kent and the home of the Kent County News.⁶¹ The town dates back to 1706 when the Maryland General Assembly, in an effort to promote trade and commerce, enacted a bill "for the development of trade and erecting ports and towns in the colony."⁶² It designated the land "on a plantation of Mr. Joice's between Mr. Wilmer's and Edward Walbin's plantation," as the site of Chestertown. The site is on the north shore of the Chester

⁵⁸ Department of Economic and Community Development, Community and Economic Inventory- Kent County Maryland, 1977, p. 52-6.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

⁶⁰ Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, March 1981.

⁶¹ Department of Economic and Community Development, Brief Industrial Facts, 1981.

⁶² William Hand Browne, ed., Archives of Maryland, vol. 26 (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1906), p. 636.

River, about ten miles up river from the Chesapeake Bay.

The town languished until 1730 when an act was passed for laying out the town anew.⁶³ At this point, the population increased, and shipping and commerce were stimulated to the point that warehouses were built as clearing places for freight and tobacco. The port thrived. Ships came from London and other points in England, Ireland, the West Indies, Portugal, Spain, the Canary Islands, and Madeira.⁶⁴ Fortunes were made, and eighteenth century Chestertown ushered in a social life reminiscent of London's elegance. Chestertown's position on the main thoroughfare from Philadelphia to Baltimore gave the city added importance.⁶⁵

The wealthy of Chestertown centered life around gaming, horse racing, and theatre.⁶⁶ A society "for the Improvement of Each others Minds" was founded in 1730.⁶⁷ Itinerant actors won critical acclaim for their productions.⁶⁸ Yet as a port of entry for the counties of Kent, Cecil,

⁶³George A. Hanson, Old Kent, The Eastern Shore of Maryland (Chestertown: R.H. Collins and Sons, 1936), p. 27.

⁶⁴Robert L. Swain, Jr., "Chestertown as a Port Before the Revolution," in Charles Clark, The Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1950), pp. 331-2.

⁶⁵Joseph Freedman, "Trade and Industry in Colonial Chestertown," in George A. Hanson, Old Kent, The Eastern Shore of Maryland (Chestertown: R.H. Collins and Sons, 1936), appendix.

⁶⁶Hulbert Footner, Rivers of the Eastern Shore (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1944), p. 327.

⁶⁷Swain, "Kent County," p. 932.

⁶⁸Ibid.

and Queen Anne's, Chestertown was also seen as a "gaudy, jaunty town, with sailors and sea captains drinking and roistering."⁶⁹ When Methodist minister Francis Ashbury passed through the town in 1785, he wrote in his journal that Chestertown was a "very wicked place."⁷⁰

With the establishment of the United States in 1789, and the development of westward expansion, Chestertown declined and changed into the rural community it is today. Like the rest of the county, Chestertown's population has remained fairly stable, increasing by only about 1,500 people in the last one hundred years.

No longer a center for international trade, Chestertown after 1800 became a somnolent Eastern Shore village. Forgetting the great days when tobacco was shipped to England from town docks, the mid-nineteenth century village was content with Bay steamers tying up to the town wharf to gather mail and passengers for the seven hour trip to Baltimore.

Agriculture reigned supreme. Chestertown's basket factory produced thousands of peach and berry baskets each day.⁷¹ A flour mill in 1890 processed county wheat into twenty-five to thirty barrels of flour every twenty-four hours.⁷²

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 938.

⁷⁰Footner, p. 329.

⁷¹Frederick G. Usilton, History of Chestertown, Kent County Maryland (Chestertown: Wm. B. Usilton and Sons, 1899), p. 58.

⁷²Ibid., p. 56.

Chestertown's fertilizer plant carried a large trade in Kent County and Delaware.⁷³ But Chestertown did not grow.

Baltimore became the international shipping center, and the cry of manifest destiny swept westward.

In the Chestertown of today one can still see the town of two hundred years ago. Dozens of eighteenth century buildings still stand. Although ships no longer set sail for England or the Carribean, the customs house stands at the foot of the town dock, a reminder of the international trade that once took place. In his book, Rivers of the Eastern Shore, Hulbert Footner noted that Chestertown is second only to Annapolis in the number of eighteenth century dwellings that have survived in Maryland. Water Street, the first street back from the Chester River, is the locale of a whole block of eighteenth century townhouses built by merchants and lived in today by town residents. The Wickes House, with fifteen working fireplaces, was the home of Lambert Wickes, captain of the Brig Reprisal, the first ship of the new U.S. Navy to fly the flag in French waters. The Geddes-Piper House was owned by William Geddes, the customs collector and owner of the ship from which Chestertown residents in 1774 threw overboard a cargo of tea.

Historic preservation and restoration continues in Chestertown today. The recently restored White Swan Tavern on Chestertown's main thoroughfare, High Street, dates from

⁷³Ibid.

the 1730s. Before work began, the site was the focus of an archeological dig which uncovered more than 40,000 artifacts.⁷⁴

Chestertown is the home of Washington College. A private, four year liberal arts college, it was founded in 1782. George Washington consented to have his name given to the infant institution, and contributed \$233.33 to the endowment.⁷⁵ He visited the college in 1784 and was given an honorary degree and appointed to the Board of Visitors and Governors. The college enrolls close to one thousand students on 104 acres just north of downtown Chestertown. Its bicentennial will be celebrated next year, and an archeological dig is underway at the site of the original building, destroyed by fire in the 1820s. The college employs almost two hundred people, making it one of the county's largest employers.⁷⁶

In some ways Chestertown has not changed as much as most towns in the last two hundred years. H. Hurtt Deringer, editor of the Kent County News, says of the town and county, "We have pursued a bucolic, mellow kind of existence since the Revolution. Like most of the Eastern Shore we have gone our way -- hard-headed, stubborn, and insulated from the

⁷⁴Diane Turpin, "A Walk Into the Past By Candlelight," Maryland Magazine 13 (August, 1980): 42.

⁷⁵Usilton, History of Chestertown, p. 29.

⁷⁶Department of Economic and Community Development, Community and Economic Inventory- Kent County Maryland, 1977, p. 14.

rest of the world until the Bay Bridge."⁷⁷

THE CHESAPEAKE BAY BRIDGE AND ITS IMPACT

The twentieth century hit the Eastern Shore of Maryland on a blistering July afternoon in 1952. After almost fifty years of controversy and an interminable five hour ceremony, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge was finally opened to traffic. The train of sputtering, overheating automobiles stretched seven miles on Kent Island, the eastern terminus of the Bridge. History is so often the story of one event or one personality that had an inexorable impact on a time or era. On the Eastern Shore of Maryland one of those events took place as the last speech ended on July 30, 1952.

Things changed quickly. Traffic swelled. Travellers on their way to Atlantic Ocean beaches left their imprint on the Eastern Shore and Kent County. Retired executives in waterfront estates and oyster tongers in tidy frame homes wondered about the disruption in their way of life.

The Shore has always been cut off from the rest of Maryland but never entirely isolated. In the nineteenth century steamers plied Bay waters between Baltimore and the Shore, but most passengers headed toward the Atlantic beaches and did not stay on the Shore. In the 1890s it was a two hour trip on the railroad that connected Claiborne, in Talbot

⁷⁷ Baltimore Sun, 4 October 1974, p. B1, B4.

County, to Ocean City on the Atlantic. By 1920 ferries replaced steamers. This meant that cars and not just people could be hauled across the Bay. This caused some highway congestion -- 700,000 cars came over by ferry in 1949 -- but life on the Shore did not change substantially.⁷⁸

The Bay Bridge was another story. By February 23, 1953, only seven months after the opening of the Bridge, the one millionth car had crossed.⁷⁹ In 1960, three million cars took the five minute drive across the Bridge.⁸⁰ In 1970 the number had doubled to six million,⁸¹ and in 1980, seven years after a parallel span opened, nearly 10.5 million cars crossed the Bridge.⁸² Clearly the Eastern Shore was inundated with traffic such as it had never known before. Along with the cars came the need for gas stations, hotels, restaurants, and, for those who longed for a summer cottage on a quiet Shore creek, the subdividers. On Kent Island alone, the eastern terminus of the Bay Bridge and site of a seventeenth century trading fort, one real estate speculator had subdivided much of the island into nearly five thousand lots by 1960.⁸³

⁷⁸Gibbons, Wye Island, p. 115.

⁷⁹Kent County News, 27 February 1953.

⁸⁰Maryland State Roads Commission, "Comparative Traffic Volume and Percent Change," (Annapolis: State Roads Commission, 1960), p. 2.

⁸¹Ibid., 1980.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Gibbons, Wye Island, p. 118.

As stated earlier, population in Kent County has remained remarkably stable, increasing only by five thousand people since 1800, with twenty-five hundred of those arriving since 1950. Queen Anne's County, directly south of Kent, has increased by only four thousand people in the last thirty years.⁸⁴ Yet local residents say they have been overrun by outsiders. Jeeps, campers, trailers, and boattrailers, many with out-of-state license plates, jam Shore roads on summer weekends headed for the beaches. According to natives, people who bought lots in subdivisions are different, and are not always wanted. One Shoreman said, "these people come over here and buy a piece of property . . . These people have come here and taken our roots away . . . Everything we've stood for all these years, they're gonna take it away from us."⁸⁵

Although most of the traffic that crossed the Bay Bridge turned south toward the resorts, Kent County still felt the reverberations of change. At least five subdivisions sprang up around the county during the 1950s and 1960s. Kent Plaza Shopping Mall, north of Chestertown, was completed in 1967 to the chagrin of many Chestertown store owners. Fast

⁸⁴Linda L. Poffenberger and James W. Longest, "Population Change in Maryland By County and Region: 1950-1970," (College Park: Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Maryland, June 1974), p. 16.

⁸⁵Gibbons, Wye Island, p. 124.

food chains arrived in 1978. The number of housing units rose by fifteen hundred over the decade between 1960 and 1970, while the median value of homes almost doubled.⁸⁶

New issues of land use, farmland preservation and the influx of outsiders were aired in the county from 1950 to 1980 -- issues often packed with emotion. The possibility of a nuclear power plant being located in the county was called the greatest threat to the rural way of life that had existed in the county for more than three hundred years.⁸⁷ Many of the county's public landings were inundated with out-of-state pick-up trucks packed with families who left trash and went crabbing illegally in county waters. By 1980, foreign real estate investments in the county went over the fourteen million mark.⁸⁸ The impact of this social change was pictured in the Kent County News.

The Kent County News is a final product of a history of newspapering in Kent County dating from 1793. In a 188 year period from 1793 to 1981, Kent County has been without a newspaper for only one thirty year period in the early nineteenth century. The history of papers in the county is filled with long editorial tenures spanning generations, and encompassing

⁸⁶ Maryland State Planning Department, Selected Physical, Financial and Occupancy Characteristics of Housing and Households 1960 and 1970, vol. 4 (Annapolis: Maryland State Planning Department, October 1972), p. 4, 6.

⁸⁷ Kent County News, 29 June 1977, 17 August 1977.

⁸⁸ Kent County News, 25 June 1980.

a myriad of changes. A look at newspapering in Kent County now follows.

CHAPTER III

NEWSPAPERING IN KENT COUNTY

On the masthead of the Kent County News appears one line of type easily overlooked when readers scan the paper. It says, "A Direct Descendant of the Chestertown Spy, est. 1793." The Apollo, or the Chestertown Spy (the paper initially used both names) was the first newspaper in Chestertown, the second on the Eastern Shore, and the first twice-a-week paper on the Shore. Much of its space was devoted to foreign news brought by ship's captains or taken from other papers that circulated on the Eastern Shore. Published letters from subscribers were signed Guillotine, Kent County Farmer, and Patriot, while advertisements plugged for a dancing school, French lessons, the best in imported liquors, and runaway slaves.⁸⁹

Sometime early in 1793, Robert Saunders, Jr., and

⁸⁹ See the Baltimore Sun, Sunday Magazine, 1 April 1928, for an overview of the Chestertown Spy; also see James H. Mullikin, "The Chestertown Spy," Enoch Pratt Library, Maryland Room, Baltimore, Maryland, n.d.

George Gerrish came to Chestertown with a printing press to establish a newspaper. Little is known of either of the men. Gerrish was a native of Nova Scotia and served an apprenticeship to a printer in Halifax. Before arriving in Maryland, he had stopped in New England and New York. Saunders, it is believed, was the son of Robert Saunders, a farmer from Harford County, Maryland.⁹⁰

About March 19, 1793, the first issue of the Apollo, or the Chestertown Spy, made its appearance on the streets of Chestertown. The exact date is not known because the oldest known copy of the paper is dated March 26, 1793, vol. 1 no. 3. The first two numbers have disappeared.

Reprinted, evidently, in number three is the editors' announcement of purpose. It makes interesting reading.

To the public

The first number of the Apollo, &c. is now submitted to the perusal of its generous patrons, with the pleasing hope that it will merit their approbation and support. . .

The Apollo, &c. is intended to be comprised of original and extracted essays, moral, political, historical, commercial, agricultural, philosophical, &c. Poetry, Anecdotes, and Abstracts of Foreign and Domestic Occurrences, which may serve to give the public a just idea of the prosperity and political situation of our own and other countries.

To this end the Editors earnestly solicit the assistance of the learned, in this and the neighboring counties, who wish the prosperity of their fellow citizens.

The Spy was to be printed every Tuesday and Friday on a "fine sheet of Crown Paper." The editors also promised

⁹⁰Mullikin, "The Chestertown Spy."

to print the proceedings of Congress at the end of each Congressional session. These were to be delivered to subscribers free of charge.

As was the case with most colonial newspapers, local news in the Apollo or Spy was scarce, usually relegated to advertisements. The first issue of the paper contained datelines from Vienna, Warsaw, Paris, London, and Brussels, in addition to news from Philadelphia, and Augusta, Georgia. The paper carried a number of George Washington's proclamations, announced the war between England, France and Holland, and reported the trial of Louis Capet, the beheaded French king.⁹¹ One of the comparatively few local news stories appeared in an edition dated June 11, 1793. It voiced the opinion that there were "royalists" among the faculty of Washington College, and said, "Away with them! We will have none of them."

Advertisements for runaway slaves portrayed their existence as brutal. For instance, one advertisement described a black woman, Hagar: "Being very worthless, it has been absolutely necessary to chastise her. The marks of a cowskin may be seen on her back."

The paper seems to have been written for an intelligent reading public, interested in the arts -- a public that might take dancing lessons, or learn to speak French from a Mr. Curley, watch a performance at the local theatre by a "Company of rope dancers, tumblers," or help a Samuel Beck

⁹¹Chestertown Spy, 26 March 1793.

organize a singing school at the church in Chestertown.

In the April 18, 1793, issue, a month after the paper began, Saunders announced that his partnership with Gerrish was dissolved and that he alone would carry on the business. No reason was given for the separation. Saunders continued to print the Spy until July 26, 1793, when he announced that the name had been changed to the more prosaic Chestertown Gazette.

On December 31, 1793, Saunders published a note saying that he could not print the proceedings of Congress, as was promised in the conditions of the first issue, because it would cost nearly two-thirds of his annual subscription receipts. Saunders wrote his readers:

He (the editor) hopes his generous friends will readily grant him that indulgence, as George Gerrish could not possibly have had any other object in view, at the time of issuing the proposals, than to induce people to subscribe, to receive their money, and make off; his conduct shortly after our commencement in this town fully justified such a supposition.

Perhaps this gave the motive for the Saunders/Gerrish separation.

The December 31, 1793, issue is the last one of the extant run. Saunders remained in Chestertown for a while operating his print shop.⁹² Of George Gerrish nothing is known although a June 19, 1797, advertisement in the Maryland Journal in Baltimore accused a George Gerrish, of Baltimore, not necessarily the same man, of stealing a horse.⁹³

⁹²Mullikin, "The Chestertown Spy."

⁹³Ibid.

For a period of thirty years, from 1793 to 1823, Kent County was without a newspaper -- at least there is no record of a paper being published. The reasons for this are purely speculative. The United States was a fledgling nation beginning to flex its muscles westward, leaving Chestertown and Kent County as part of the quiet backwaters of the Chesapeake Bay. No longer did brigs and sloops sail in from England, Portugal or the West Indies bringing with them news of European wars and slave uprisings. Chestertown was no longer a stop on the north/south turnpike route. Perhaps Kent Countians were unimpressed with the product of Saunders and Gerrish, or did not have the commercial activity necessary to sustain a newspaper.

Whatever the reason, a newspaper did not appear in Kent County until 1823 when a Mr. Michael opened up a print shop and began putting out the Telegraph.⁹⁴ From that date forward there has been an unbroken chain of newspapering in Kent County. Although there is no direct line to the Chestertown Spy, the Kent County News claims "direct descendance." According to the present editor, H. Hurtt Deringer, this is because the building the News is produced in today probably stands on the same ground where Saunders and Gerrish produced the Spy.⁹⁵

In the 1830's, the Telegraph's name was changed to

⁹⁴Usilton, History of Kent County, p. 202.

⁹⁵Interview with H. Hurtt Deringer, Chestertown, Maryland, 20 June 1981.

the Kent Bugle and it was published by William P. Mathews.⁹⁶ The Bugle was a "political, literary and agricultural journal" of four pages, published every Friday. Page one contained fiction and poetry, and agricultural anecdotes such as a "dissertation on making and applying manure."⁹⁷ Important "foreign extracts" from Europe filled page two along with the proceedings of the U.S. Congress. All of the advertisements appeared on pages three and four. Sale notices praised the attributes of young black slaves, parcels of land, writing desks, and fruit trees. Ads for boat excursions to Baltimore appeared next to ads selling lumber and farm implements. The only national advertising was for two magazines, Godey's Lady's Magazine of Philadelphia started in 1830, and the American Magazine of Useful Knowledge, of Boston.

Although ads in the Bugle were for local concerns, there was very little local news. Since the community was small, it was assumed everyone knew what was going on, and news was regarded as something outside the community. Hence the appearance of "foreign extracts" and the abundance of national news in the Bugle. Now and then, however, a local news item appeared in the paper. For example, the December 11, 1835, Bugle reported on page two that a fire broke out in Chestertown two days earlier and threatened the whole town before the wind blew the flames away from the downtown area.

⁹⁶Usilton, History of Kent County, p. 202.

⁹⁷Kent Bugle, 26 December 1834.

In reporting the fire the Bugle wrote rather condescendingly:

We take much pleasure in noticing the great activity and zeal of our colored population, they were promptly on the spot; wherever their services were required they were efficiently rendered.

It was also reported that the Maryland State Geologist found green sand or green marl in the county.⁹⁸ The sand was of high quality, used as a fertilizer for soils deficient in lime. The paper noted that "a sample has been left at the Bugle office and gentlemen are invited to examine it in order to become better acquainted with its appearance."⁹⁹

In 1839 the name of the paper was changed again to the Kent News, and it was published by a Senator Vickers. From 1849 to 1858 the Kent News was published by Edward Mansfield. James M. Vickers took charge in 1858 and published the paper until 1860.¹⁰⁰

Like the Bugle, the Kent News of 1860 was four pages long and six columns wide. Page one contained poetry, literary and humorous anecdotes, recipes and historical sketches. Foreign news which appeared in the Bugle and Spy was absent in the Kent News, but, typical for papers of this era, at least one page was dedicated to national events and reprints from newspapers across the country. There was, however, one column on page two specifically labelled as "Local Matters."

⁹⁸Kent Bugle, 7 August 1835.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Usilton, History of Kent County, p. 202.

These were usually one or two sentence reports of county events or of county people. The column included, for instance, this grisly bit of county news:

Coroner Carroll held an inquest on Tuesday upon the body of Bob Walley of Still Pond who was found on Sunday morning in the agonies of death. Verdict -- death from exposure.¹⁰¹

Advertising filled most of pages three and four, with the majority of ads for local businesses selling dry goods, groceries, linen, liquors, fertilizers and fish. Patent medicine advertisements, two or three per issue, such as those for "Mrs. Cox's Indian Vegetable Decoction" which purified the blood,¹⁰² were the only national advertising.

The Kent News was strictly Democratic following the politics of the Eastern Shore and most of the state of Maryland. Editor Vickers begrudgingly accepted the Lincoln presidency, as did other Maryland papers from Cumberland to Cambridge,¹⁰³ and said:

We believe, as far as our information is based upon the election returns received, that this gentleman is legally and Constitutionally the choice of the people, and so believing we take the man, Republican as he is, if not as our choice, at all events with

¹⁰¹ Kent News, 7 January 1860.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Richard Walsh and William Lloyd Fox, Maryland: A History, 1632-1974 (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1974), p. 330.

the respect which is his just due; and shall judge him by his administration.¹⁰⁴

In his valedictory or farewell to the readers in 1860, Vickers stressed his devotion to the Union saying:

Regarding the Union of the States as the very ark of our safety and power, we cling to it as the sheet anchor of our unexampled prosperity and greatness. It has made us what we are as a nation and by no act of ours is it to be weakened.¹⁰⁵

Vickers also happily noted in his farewell that, "It is a source of satisfaction to us to know that we leave the News in the hands of two enterprising and industrious young men (William B. Usilton and James H. Plummer) whose political principles correspond with ours."¹⁰⁶

At this point the Usilton family entered the county newspapering scene -- an association that was to last more than one hundred years. According to William B. Usilton III, editor emeritus of the Kent County News, the majority of the extended Usilton family was farmers.¹⁰⁷ Usilton's grandfather, William B. Usilton, was the first family member to break the farming pattern when in 1852 he entered the composing room of the Kent News as a printer's devil. Eight years later, on November 17, 1860, William B. Usilton and his uncle,

¹⁰⁴ Kent News, 10 November 1860.

¹⁰⁵ Kent News, 17 November 1860.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, 20 June 1981.

James H. Plummer, became editors of the Kent News. These two men, functioning as the team of Plummer and Usilton, continued together for thirty years until the death of the senior member, Plummer in 1890.

In their "salutatory" remarks in 1860, Plummer and Usilton said their "highest ambition" was to make a "good paper."¹⁰⁸ Of special interest, however, was that the co-editors wanted to devote more space to local news:

Particular attention will be given to the collection of all news of an exclusively local or county character, that may be deemed of sufficient importance to justify publication. There is no doubt that county newspapers are generally deficient in this particular.

Plummer and Usilton made good on their promise by doubling the amount of local news to two columns. Reporting of local events was of greater depth than the one sentence statements that appeared in the Kent News of Vickers. For example, the paper reported that the "Union men intend celebrating their great victory (elections) by a Torchlight Procession and Illumination in Chestertown this Saturday. It is expected that all our citizens who love the Old Union and still revere the Old Star Spangled Banner of their country will illuminate their houses."¹¹⁰ A longer local

¹⁰⁸ Kent News, 17 November 1860.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Kent News, 9 November 1861.

news story noted that,

A daring incendiary attempt was made early on Thursday morning last to destroy the Kent News and Masonic Hall Building. It was set on fire in the fuel room of the News office the door of which was unlocked.

The object of this incendiary may have been to plunder the store beneath our office, we can hardly believe it attributable to political animosity against ourselves.

It cannot be disguised that there is in our community a company of loungers and villains, who are never known to do a day's work and yet live in as much apparent comfort and ease as our most industrious citizens . . .¹¹¹

Usilton's initiation as editor got off to an exciting beginning. In 1860 a group of federal troops came to Kent County via steamboat, marched up High Street, surrounded the offices of the Kent News and carted Usilton off to a Baltimore jail. Along with him went most of the prominent men of the town including the deputy sheriff and election judges. Their alleged crime -- opposition to John Frazier, candidate for county clerk. Frazier was provost marshal of Kent County, overseer of the military police during the early stages of the Civil War. On election day, Frazier used his clout as provost marshal to send two government steamers to Chestertown with orders to arrest everyone who criticized him. The editors of the Kent News were forced to print a circular telling everyone to vote for the ticket including Frazier, and soldiers were sent to every polling place in the county to see this was carried out. The plot, involving a political dispute between Frazier and the incumbent county clerk, was not exposed

¹¹¹Kent News, 23 March 1861.

until the arrested Kent Countians were in Baltimore. Usilton and the other prisoners were immediately returned to Chestertown while Frazier and cronies were arrested.¹¹²

After Plummer's death, his interest in the business was purchased by Frederick G. Usilton, son of William B. Usilton, and until January 1, 1901, the publishers' names were given as William B. Usilton and Sons. In 1901 William B. Usilton Jr. succeeded his father, the publishers' names then being William B. Usilton's Sons.

The Kent News of the early twentieth century was an eight page newspaper devoted almost entirely to local events. Columns titled "Local News," "Personal and Society Events in Kent County," and "Church Notes," as well as correspondence from hamlets across the county, were scattered throughout the paper. Even World War I was given a local angle in the Kent News. Stories about war preparations in the county, draft registration, and war personalities appeared during the months of 1917. A "Local War Notes" column included news such as, "_____ was the first to register in the first precinct of Chestertown," and "the first Kent Countian to reach France was a lady, Miss _____ a trained nurse."¹¹³

The Kent News was caught up in the war preparations and did its best to report the efforts of citizens toward the war. It also commented on what it saw as disgraceful:

¹¹²Usilton, History of Kent County, p. 204.

¹¹³Kent News, 9 June 1917.

There are some pitiful scenes being enacted in connection with the draft in Kent County. The writer was witness to a most annoying sight a few days since. A man who had been drafted and examined for the Army was pronounced physically unfit. Upon his return to his friends he was surrounded and congratulated enthusiastically. Just think of it! A man felicitated for being a physical misfit! That is the breed we have in this land of Washington and Patrick Henry. . . ¹¹⁴

Three-quarters of page one during this period was filled with advertising from local banks and businesses. In the upper right corner appeared two stories about events in the county. National advertising, which appeared in equal amounts to local ads, was for medicines such as Scott's Emulsion, Sloan's Linament, Dr. King's New Discovery for Coughs and Colds, Lydia Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and Chichester Pills.

An important part of the paper which appeared about this time, and which continues today, was the personal news written by county-wide correspondents. Local correspondents, usually housewives, compiled weekly lists of community events, births, deaths, weddings, vacations, and other assorted personal items. The "news" was literally paragraph after paragraph of names from the small villages and cross-roads throughout the county including Rock Hall, Galena, Tolchester, Betterton, Lynch, Still Pond, Worton, Quaker Neck, Millington, and Kennedyville. Sample items from a 1917 issue include: "Miss _____ is enjoying a vacation

¹¹⁴Ibid., 11 August 1917.

at Cape May, New Jersey; Mr. _____ has returned home from the hospital; the Ladies Bridge Club will meet next Thursday . . . " According to William B. Usilton III, people liked to see their names and the names of friends in print.¹¹⁵ The local news sections also acted as bulletin boards for letting people know what their friends across the county were doing.

In 1933 William B. Usilton III, grandson of William B. Usilton, joined the Kent News, eventually becoming editor and publisher. Today, as editor emeritus of the Kent County News he writes a weekly column for the paper called "Looking 'Em Over." The column has been in existence since the early 1930s when it was subtitled "Purely Personal Piffle." It presents a mishmash of local tidbits including items of history, lists of area nicknames, and personal remembrances of the past.

Through the years the chief competition of the Kent News was the Chestertown Transcript founded in 1862 by Eben F. Perkins, a Chestertown attorney. The Transcript of the 1860s was very similar to the Kent News in many respects. Page one contained clippings of travelogues to London and New York, fiction, and the latest foreign news. Like the Kent News, page two was filled with stories clipped from other newspapers including the Baltimore Sun, Richmond

¹¹⁵ Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, March 1981.

Dispatch, and Cincinnati Gazette. Advertising was strictly local, with many of the same advertisers, namely banks and businesses, appearing in both papers. National advertising was limited to one or two ads for medicine and magazines.

Local news was conspicuously sparse, even more so than in the Kent News. The only local news, besides advertising, in the four page issue of May 20, 1862, was the following:

The oat crop in the vicinity of our town, seems to be seriously affected by swarms of a new species of insect.

Like the Kent News, the paper was strictly Democratic and supported the Union during the Civil War. It even printed the entire U.S. Constitution on page four in the initial stages of the war.

In 1888 the paper was bought by Richard H. Collins Sr. who had earlier worked for the Centreville (Queen Anne's County, Maryland) Observer and for large dailies in Baltimore and Philadelphia. By this time local news coverage in the Transcript had increased to two full columns. It included descriptions of such events as commencement at Washington College, and the impact of weather conditions on county farming. This development paralleled the increase of local news in the Kent News and in weekly newspapers across the country.¹¹⁶

Collins continued to publish the Transcript until his death in February, 1935. His son, Richard H. Collins Jr.,

¹¹⁶David J. Russo, "The Origins of Local News in the U.S. Country Press, 1840s - 1870s," Journalism Monographs (February 1980).

after a three-year stint as a marine engineer, in 1921 returned to Chestertown to work for his father on the Transcript. He continued to edit and publish the paper after his father's death.

The Kent News and the Transcript were both Democratic newspapers and competed for the attention of the county's Democrats -- the majority party in the county. County Democrats were split in two factions, the organization and the anti-organization, the latter being slightly more conservative. According to Usilton, these factions generated hard-fought primary battles because, invariably, whoever won the Democratic primary election won the general election.¹¹⁷ The Kent News was aligned with the organization while the Transcript was anti-organization. According to Usilton, the Usiltions and the Collinses grew up together, played together, lived across the street from each other as adults and were close friends.¹¹⁸ This, however, did not stop them from "raising hell" with each other in the paper. For example, the Kent News of January 20, 1917, called the Transcript an "inkslayer" and a "fomenter of double oil and double trouble."

Yet there was great cooperation between the two staffs; a sharing of equipment, knowledge and expertise.¹¹⁹ For example, in the days of hot type, if the courthouse had a

¹¹⁷ Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, 20 June 1981.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

notice to creditors that was ordered to go in two papers, the type was not set by both papers. If the Kent News got the order it would set the type and the Transcript would borrow it and vice versa.¹²⁰

In 1893 a third newspaper, the Enterprise, tried to capture county readership. The Enterprise was founded by L. Bates Russell, a Chestertown native engaged in the fire and life insurance business. In the first four page edition, September 27, 1893, Russell noted he was not worried about the other papers and looked forward to launching his "little barque upon the sea of public opinion." Russell started the paper as a business proposition independent of political connections, but it eventually acted as the Republican voice in a predominantly Democratic Kent County. For example, in 1936, while the Kent News and the Transcript praised Franklin Roosevelt, the Enterprise said he was a "king in all but name, a visionary and erratic ruler who uses his subjects as guinea pigs upon which to try new and fantastic schemes of social planning."¹²¹

After graduating from Washington College in 1925, Harry S. Russell, son of L. Bates Russell and close friend of the Usiltons and Collinses, took over the reins of the Enterprise. Characterized by William B. Usilton III as the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Enterprise, 28 October 1936.

"best country newspaper editor" he had ever known, Russell was a dedicated worker, often spending twelve hours a day at the office.¹²² Russell also had numerous pieces of light verse published in the New Yorker.¹²³

For fifty-three years Kent County had the three weekly newspapers, two Democratic and one Republican. Many Maryland towns on the Eastern Shore had two papers, including Elkton, Easton, and Cambridge, but only Chestertown had three. According to Usilton, the Kent News was considered the county's leading paper in terms of circulation, advertising and prestige.¹²⁴ The papers were not members of the Audit Bureau of Circulation so accurate circulation figures were not kept. Usilton estimated the Kent News had a circulation in the 1930s of 2,500 to 3,000, while the Transcript's circulation was less than 2,000 and the Enterprise's circulation even smaller.¹²⁵ All of the papers were seven columns wide and eight pages in length, and many of the same advertisers appeared in all three.

This changed in 1946 when the Kent County News was founded as the result of a merger between the Kent News and the Chestertown Transcript. Frederick G. Usilton,

¹²² Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, 20 June 1981.

¹²³ Kent County News, 6 December 1972.

¹²⁴ Telephone interview with William B. Usilton III, 15 September 1981.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

president of the Kent News, said of the merger:

It has been physically impossible in the past few years for either of the two papers to increase its space to allow a proper coverage of the news. The reader has therefore suffered. It has also been difficult to keep abreast of the growing requests for commercial printing. With the consolidation issued weekly by the combined staffs, unlimited possibilities for full coverage of the news have been established.¹²⁶

William B. Usilton III, editor of the Kent News, and Richard H. Collins Jr., editor of the Chestertown Transcript, became co-editors, advertising managers, publishers and business managers. William S. Collins, brother of Richard H. Collins, became the head of the job printing department of Kent Publishing Company, the company formed in the merger.

William B. Usilton III was born in Chestertown in 1907. After attending Kent County public schools and graduating from Washington College in 1929, he worked for Radio Keith Orpheum Corporation in its publishing, promotion and advertising departments in New York and Detroit. In 1933 he returned to Chestertown to work with his uncle, Frederick, and his father, William B. Usilton Jr., on the Kent News.

Also born in Chestertown, but in 1897, ten years before Usilton, was Richard H. Collins Jr., co-editor and publisher of the Kent County News. Like Usilton he attended Kent County public schools and graduated from Chestertown High School in 1915. He then entered Pratt Institute in New York and in 1917 earned an engineering degree. From

¹²⁶ Baltimore Evening Sun, 28 January 1946.

1918 to 1921 he worked for the U.S. Shipping Board and various steamship companies as a marine engineer, but returned to Chestertown in 1921 to work with his father on the Transcript.

In 1949 the Kent Publishing Company bought the Enterprise from Harry S. Russell, but continued to publish it. The tabloid Enterprise was printed and distributed every Wednesday while the Kent County News was distributed on Fridays. By 1952, however, William B. Usilton III said the unprofitable Enterprise was taking the news edge off the money-making Kent County News, so it was discontinued.¹²⁷ Harry S. Russell, editor of the Enterprise, then became news editor of the Kent County News. This left the Kent County News as the sole paper in the county. Longtime friends and associates William B. Usilton III, Richard H. Collins Jr., and Harry S. Russell, all who had owned and operated their own newspapers in the county, and whose families had published and edited Kent County papers for almost one hundred years, were then on the job together, under one roof, at one newspaper.

¹²⁷ Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, March 1981.

CHAPTER IV

THE KENT COUNTY NEWS: 1950 - 1980

In the past thirty years, more changes have occurred in the Kent County News than manifested themselves during the entire previous century of newspapering in Kent County. Change occurred in design, advertising and editorial content, use of photographs, number of pages and columns, and subscription rates. A descriptive analysis of issues for a typical week -- the second week of July -- surveyed at five-year intervals shows that the newspaper has been transformed from a sleepy weekly into a modern news operation. Linked to the transformation has been change in editorial staff and ownership of the paper.

A typical 1950 issue of twenty-two pages, under the direction of Russell, Usilton, and Collins, was vertically designed. It contained eight columns per page with the majority of the headlines only one column wide. A banner headline was usually strung across the top of the page with the lead article in the top right corner. Photographs were used sparingly and were usually one column cuts of individuals such as a

local political candidate or a Kent County youth trying to break into professional baseball.

Page one in 1950 looked cluttered. It contained about twenty stories, some five to twenty paragraphs in length, along with one paragraph items. These announced such news as the promotion of a local law enforcement officer or hospitalization of a county resident. The longer news stories took up topics such as Kent's quota for the draft during the Korean conflict, the results of a sailing regatta, and coverage of car accidents and fires. An average of about forty-five names, most of them of Kent County residents, appeared on page one throughout the 1950s.

The Kent County News became a member of the Associated Press in 1946 after the merger of the Kent News and the Chestertown Transcript. Rarely, if ever, did AP hard news stories appear on page one. The paper was dedicated to presenting local news. Associated Press features and cartoons did, however, appear on the editorial page.

National advertisers such as Coca-Cola, Sears, Esso, Frigidaire, most major automobile manufacturers, tire companies and breweries bought about half the advertising space in the paper. Local ads appeared from businesses, banks and stores. The paper also contained about one page of classified advertising through the 1950s. Legal notices of estate sales and bankruptcy proceedings, notices of public hearings and announcements of auctions were also carried.

The editorial page emphasized national issues. For instance, a 1950 editorial titled "Must We Adopt Political Imperialism?" suggested that the United States should take an active role in trying to spread democracy across the globe especially to the countries it was assisting.¹²⁸ Editorials ran on communism versus capitalism, inflation, the merchant marine, and the farmer. Few were directly aimed at Kent Countians. Usilton attributed the editorials to lack of television. He noted that people had no television to receive national news and opinion so the paper provided them.¹²⁹ The editorials were not canned or bought from an editorial service but were written by Usilton, Collins or Russell.¹³⁰ An editor's caucus decided who would write an editorial and what its contents would be. There were usually three to four editorials per issue, short and to the point, because, in Usilton's opinion people were more apt to read a short editorial than a long one.¹³¹ Occasionally the Kent County News printed editorials from other newspapers that clearly paralleled its view on an issue.

Other components of the 1950s editorial page mixed national and local issues. The Kent County News carried AP filler material such as editorial cartoons, and news features

¹²⁸Kent County News, 14 July 1950.

¹²⁹Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, March 1981.

¹³⁰Ibid., 20 June 1981.

¹³¹Ibid., March 1981.

on communism, nuclear war, and the Korean War. A column called "Capitol Comment" was written by first district congressman Edward T. Miller. "Timely Topics" were short editorial statements about local events. A 1955 column, for example, discussed the problems of annexing a new development into Chestertown's city limits, praised the Jaycees for donating garbage cans to Chestertown, and reminded Kent youth about the summer baseball league.

Other weekly features appeared on the editorial page. "Grass Roots Opinion" contained portions of editorials from other weekly newspapers across the country. "Out of the Frying Pan" was a weekly column written by Nell C. Westcott, a county resident. The column was a rambling affair about her garden, her birthday, her mail, her friends or anything else that seemed to strike her fancy.

Personal news written by county-wide correspondents continued to appear throughout the paper. Combined together these columns covered almost 1½ pages of the paper. Sample items of personal information about people across the county included: "Miss _____ is enjoying a vacation at Rehobeth Beach, Delaware; Members of the Chestertown Garden Club were entertained on Thursday at their July meetings; Mr. _____ has returned home after a minor operation at the local hospital."¹³²

These personal news items continued to make the paper

¹³²Kent County News, 14 July 1950.

intimate, friendly, and intensely local, and were advertised as community service. An editorial on January 17, 1958, deplored the "space grafters," or big corporations that sent press releases and other information to weekly newspapers. The editorial noted that "whatever free space is devoted to promotions will be restricted to local people, places and things. . . when we begin to fail to sincerely work for the interests of Kent County we'll put the cover on the typewriter, burn the copy paper, and lock both doors."

In the 1960s the paper changed to a more modern layout and more locally oriented editorial content. Although page one appeared still cluttered, with an average of eighteen stories, more and larger photographs were used to make the page more appealing. Two three-column photographs usually appeared on page one. Banner headlines also disappeared in the 1960s.

The 1960s brought a shift from national to more local advertising. Both William B. Usilton III and H. Hurtt Deringer said this occurred because national advertisers, once strong supporters of local papers, turned to the mass markets of television, radio, and large circulation magazines. During the 60s, most of the advertising space was bought by local concerns in Kent County, Queen Anne's County, and Delaware. Included were hardware stores, grain storage facilities, and clothing and grocery stores. The Kent County News of the 1960s continued to contain classified advertising, expanding from one page in the 50s to 1½ in the 60s. Generally,

the number of pages per issue remained at about twenty-two.

Whereas the editorial page of the 1950s was geared toward national issues, the editorials of the 1960s began to cover local issues. The change occurred, according to Usilton, because of the popularity of television news.¹³³ The Kent County News therefore had to focus more on local issues and abandon its comment on national themes -- comment that county residents could get from large dailies and television. As an example of local comment, a 1960 lead editorial called on the employees of the nearby Campbell's Soup Company not to unionize because, among other things, "non-union workers don't have to fork over an ever increasing part of their wages to union parasites."¹³⁴ National issues, however, still had some place on the editorial page of the 60s. An editorial on the same page left the realm of the county to discuss Castro and Khrushchev.

As the editorials became more local in content during the 60s, so did accompanying content. Associated Press features were gradually phased out and replaced with lists of new books at the library, tide timetables, cartoons about local events and letters to the editor. Nell Westcott's "Out of the Frying Pan" continued to appear, but new weekly columnists replaced "Timely Topics" and "Grass Roots Opinion." One was Gilbert

¹³³ Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, 20 June 1981.

¹³⁴ Kent County News, 14 July 1960.

Byron, author and Chestertown native, whose weekly column from his book Chesapeake Cove talked about his daily life on the Shore. First district congressional reports continued to appear on the editorial page.

As the scope narrowed, the paper triumphed its small-town view of the world. A January 29, 1960, editorial commemorated 167 years of newspapering in Kent County and stated that "it is our aim to promote at all times the best interests of this community, to call attention to what we think are its faults, and to praise the fine work of our citizens when praise is deserving."

An October 8, 1969, editorial was more specific:

Being a hometown paper we feel fortunate in not being required to report too much of what someone has called the 'warts' on the world today -- Vietnam, racial rioting, student demonstrations, decaying cities . . . and other ills.

We also feel fortunate in being able to chronicle the successes and the triumphs of our neighbors and the accomplishments of their progeny, the gladness and sadness of our friends.

In addition, a December 10, 1969, editorial discussed the death of Spenser Moody Petersen, a loyal Kent County News employee for fifty years. In part it read:

Mr. Petersen who would have been 70 years old in early January began as a printer's devil -- an odd job specialist whose chores range from sweeping up to borrowing a left handed monkey wrench -- at the age of 15. Until a few weeks ago he was newspapering . . .

For what it's worth -- his entire working life was spent in one location, the corner of Cross and Cannon Streets, Chestertown. He was a loyal employee, and for some of his colleagues, a friend of more than fifty years. He is already missed.

The 1960s also saw the partial break up of the Russell, Usilton, Collins team. William S. Collins, head of the job printing department, died in April 1967, and his brother, Richard, retired in September of the same year, selling his stock in Kent Publishing back to the company. Majority control passed to William B. Usilton III and his wife, Evelyn. Usilton remained as publisher with Harry S. Russell as editor.

The 1970s saw the Kent County News blossom into a modern paper with a horizontal layout. Page one, with an average of eleven stories, appeared more pleasing to the eye than it had during the 50s and 60s. The one paragraph notices about local parties or illnesses were moved to the inside pages. By the 1970s, two large photographs, three and four columns wide and five to six inches deep, commonly were placed on page one. The number of names on page one decreased to an average of about twenty-five to thirty due to the shift of personal items to the inside pages. A mixture of two, three and four column headlines added sparkle to the page.

Advertising content continued to consist of local concerns and the amount of advertising stayed proportionally the same as the paper grew to about thirty pages per issue. Classified advertising increased to almost two full pages in the 70s, and legal notices of bankruptcy proceedings, estate sales, and auctions continued.

Editorials focused almost exclusively on local issues ranging from zoning battles to candidates for county commissioner to praise for local clean-up crews. Accompanying material was all locally oriented. Included were reports from first district congressman Robert Bauman, and a weekly feature called "From Our Early Files" which reprinted paragraphs from the Kent County News 10 and 25 years ago, and from the Kent News 50 and 100 years ago. A new weekly columnist, Pleasanton L. Conquest III, wrote in his "Man About Town" column of the weekly goings on in Chestertown. For instance, in July of 1975 he discussed the "boundless good nature and patience" of employees at the local Drug Fair store, noting that they managed to stay "hometown in spite of the big chain syndrome" that prevailed in other parts of the United States.

As in the past, county-wide correspondents supplied personal news, and editorials expressed an intimate tone. On June 30, 1971, the paper printed an editorial about a production mistake:

Last week a funny thing happened on the way to the press room -- we lost a page. Actually we didn't lose a page we printed the same page twice.

Printing a newspaper isn't the simple thing it used to be what with paste-up pages, negatives, and aluminum plates . . . The cameraman didn't like the looks of page 4 negative and grabbed page 4 but B instead of A to make a new one. Thus the June 23 edition had two B-4s and no A-4. The little community of Barclay was the only beneficiary -- its budget of news blazoned forth twice.

Readers will not be losers however. All of the social news items on the original A-4 will be found in today's issue. Nevertheless we apologize and trust our readers realize our embarrassment. We wish we could promise it won't happen again.

Personnel changes also occurred in the 70s as they had in the 60s. Usilton continued as publisher but editor Harry S. Russell died in 1972 to be succeeded by Ralph H. "Sonny" Usilton, associate editor. Sonny Usilton was killed in a traffic accident in 1974 while covering a story. H. Hurtt Deringer, appointed associate editor three months before the death of his lifelong friend Sonny Usilton, then was named editor. Deringer had become associate editor in July 1974 after having worked in various newspaper and public relations capacities in the county.

A native of Kent County, Deringer, like the previous editors, went to public school in the county and graduated from Chestertown High School in 1954. After 2½ years at Washington College, he entered the Marine Corps. While stationed on a communications ship for six months, he wrote a sports column for the ship's newspaper. He covered sports for the school newspaper when he returned to Washington College. After graduation Deringer worked briefly for a radio station in Pennsylvania but returned to Chestertown to work for Lamotte Chemical Company just north of Chestertown.

In 1961, Kent Countian Gilbert Watson, wanting a Republican voice in the county, started a tabloid called the Chester River Press in his garage in the Quaker Neck section of the county. Although Deringer was not interested in partisan politics, he wanted to cover county sports.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Interview with H. Hurtt Deringer, Chestertown, Maryland, 20 June 1981.

In June of 1962, Watson hired Deringer to write a sports column titled "Voice of a Fan." Nineteen years later, Deringer still writes the column for the Kent County News.

In the fall of 1962, Watson asked Deringer to become news editor of the Chester River Press. Deringer at first refused because his job with Lamotte Chemical seemed more secure. But his experience as a sports writer and his desire to try journalism prompted him to accept the offer in October 1962. The Chester River Press, however, was never a money maker, according to Deringer, and he left the paper in 1968, two years before it folded.

In 1968 Deringer became public relations director and sports information director at Washington College. But after six years of writing press releases and dealing with the politics of the college presidency, Deringer was eager to get back into newspaper work. In July of 1974 he was appointed associate editor of the Kent County News and became editor three months later.

With Deringer as editor, the paper was still published by Usilton. In 1974, however, Usilton sold the Kent County News to Tri-State Publishing Company of Elkton, Maryland. The reasons for the sale were varied. First, there were no other Usilton family members who wanted to carry on the tradition of owning a Kent County newspaper. Also, there were no individuals or groups in the county willing to buy the paper. In addition, and most important, chain ownership of weekly

newspapers was becoming commonplace nationwide and on the Eastern Shore, especially with the rise of new offset printing technology and the parallel development of centralized printing plants. According to Deringer, the Kent County News had wanted to but an offset press but did not because of the expense.¹³⁶

However, E. Ralph Hostetter, owner of Tri-State Publishing Company, and publisher of the Cecil Whig, bought an offset press in the early 60s and used it to print the Whig. Modern offset presses gave new clarity to papers and sparkle to photographs. It was also more practical to have a centralized printing plant for a number of papers instead of each buying an offset press. In addition, the plants offered uniform quality of press work. Travel to a central plant took time, but gains in clarity of printing and control over production costs at centralized plants compensated for travel time.¹³⁷

According to Deringer, by the early 1960s it took the Kent County News two days to print a complete edition using the hot type presses. So in the mid-60s, in an agreement with Hostetter, the Kent County News began to take camera ready copy to a centralized plant in Elkton, Maryland, about thirty miles north of Chestertown for printing. In 1972, the Kent County News moved its paste-up operation to Elkton.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ John L. Sim, Grass Roots Press (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1969), chapter 9.

Two years later, Usilton sold the Kent County News for an undisclosed amount of money to Tri-State Publishing Company, owners of weekly papers in Denton, Cambridge, Federalsburg, and Easton, Maryland, in addition to newspapers in Seaford and Newark, Delaware.

Tri-State Publishing Company, in 1975, in turn sold the Kent County News to Whitney Communications Corporation of New York. Whitney is a private corporation headed by John Hay Whitney, one-time U.S. ambassador to England and past publisher of the New York Herald Tribune. Since Whitney is a private corporation it did not provide public information about the acquisition, but in a telephone interview in 1981, a public relations representative said the corporation wanted to expand its holdings in weekly newspapers in 1975 because they were profitable.¹³⁸

Whitney Communications Corporation today is owner or part owner of a variety of communications media including newspapers, magazines and cable television. The magazine division of the corporation publishes Art in America, Interior Design, Boating Industry, 50 Plus, The Waterway Guide, The Oil Daily, Coal Industry News and Hockey News. Whitney owns a number of cable television operations in Maine and New Hampshire. The company also has a one-third interest in the International Herald Tribune.

¹³⁸ Telephone interview with Paulette Young, Public Relations Assistant, Whitney Communications Corporation, 15 July 1981.

Since 1975 the company has bought twenty-four weekly newspapers in Maryland and Delaware, and one daily paper, the Star Democrat in Easton, Maryland. Nine of the papers are on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Six are located in Southern Maryland. Six others are located around Baltimore, and four are in Delaware.

As change occurred in ownership of the paper, the editors said they perceived subtle differences in their roles. In an interview in 1981, Deringer noted that although he felt no direct pressure from Whitney concerning editorial content, he was frustrated over a feeling of self censorship especially when he wanted to express opinions about corporate power and technology and their effect on small communities and weekly newspapers.¹³⁹ According to Deringer, the United States is too fixated on bigness and corporate control and has lost touch with the grass roots. As editor of a weekly newspaper owned by a large corporation, Deringer feels that the Kent County News is not the most appropriate forum for him to express views about what he considers detrimental effects of that bigness. Usilton, in an interview in 1981, stated that big corporations were interested in only one thing -- the bottom, or making more money. This, and the fact that the paper was owned by interests outside the county,

¹³⁹ Interview with H. Hurtt Deringer, Chestertown, Maryland, 20 June 1981.

he said, took some of the edge off the editor being seen by Kent Countians as a community leader, even though the editor was doing a good job.¹⁴⁰

Deringer also remarked that historically, as papers have moved into chains, editors have lost a certain amount of freedom. "To be a really good editor," said Deringer, "there are a lot of areas where you should be probing and looking, but you're going to bump into a lot of advertisers in there. And as it gets tougher to survive (economically) you get gun shy because the . . . costs are going out of sight."¹⁴¹

Usilton agreed, and noted that the editors of chain owned papers think they have to be extra careful of finances or risk being dropped by the chain.¹⁴²

Even though owned by the Whitney chain, however, the Kent County News looks and reads much the same as it did before the sale to Tri-State and subsequent transfer to Whitney Communications Corporation. With a six column horizontal layout, two, three, and four column headlines add variety to the front page as do large photographs of people, accident scenes or natural beauty in the county such as views of farmland, a flock of geese, or a water scene.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, March 1981.

¹⁴¹ Interview with H. Hurtt Deringer, Chestertown, Maryland, 20 June 1981.

¹⁴² Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, March 1981.

The clean look of the page is enhanced by the sans serif typeface of the headlines.

Generally, six to eight stories appear on the front page. Usually twenty to twenty-five names are seen on page one, the majority of them of Kent County residents. This is a decline from the average of forty-five names that appeared through the 50s and 60s.

Advertising remains local, coming from businesses or promoting events in Kent County, Queen Anne's County or the northern counties of Delaware. There is very little national advertising except for an occasional advertisement for cigarettes or automobiles. Classified ads take up about 2½ pages of a typical issue.

As in the 70s, the editorial page is almost exclusively oriented to local events. For instance, the editorial on June 10, 1981, concerned a page one story about a car accident in Queen Anne's County on Route 213, the major north/south artery through both Kent and Queen Anne's counties. The editorial described the accident and called for use of good judgement on all county roads. Also on the editorial page were letters to the editor, "From Our Early Files," and Usilton's weekly column, "Looking 'Em Over."

Personal news from local correspondents continued to appear. Sample items in a June 10, 1981, edition are almost identical to those thirty years earlier: "There were quite a few folks who attended the fish fry at the Wheelhouse this past Saturday and as usual Roy does a nice job . . . Mr. and

Mrs. _____ were recently overnight visitors . . . Sympathy to _____ . . . Mr. and Mrs. _____ announce the birth of their second child . . ."

In addition, local issues and the personal quality of the paper continue to be stressed as evidenced in this December 24, 1980, editorial:

. . . we are not like other newspapers, and we don't want to be . . . If having a deep sense of community is being provincial -- then we are guilty. If our love for the specialness of this area is considered too "homegrown" than once again we are guilty . . . For we are involved in our own minds with our area. Yes we care about the rest of the world. But we believe if more people believed in themselves and their hometowns and their country, their farms and their backyards, their rivers and creeks, roads and highways -- then we would all have a better place to live in.

Claiming a 90 percent household saturation in Kent County, the paper today has a circulation approaching eight thousand. The paper is thirty cents per copy, twelve dollars per year in Kent County and sixteen dollars elsewhere. In 1950 the paper cost five cents per issue or two dollars for a year's subscription. By 1960 the cost per issue had doubled to ten cents, while a year's subscription was three dollars and circulation was sixty-five hundred.

As the paper became more insular in editorial policy, it found plenty to write about in reaction to the changes brought by the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. That Chestertown and Kent County slowly but surely lost their "off the beaten path" status was an important source of news for the paper;

and the struggle of the community to preserve its way of life regularly made headlines and editorial copy.

CHAPTER V

"LINKED AT LAST" OR "THE ANT-LIKE MARCH TO THE SEA"

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge was probably the single most important element that changed the face of the Eastern Shore and Kent County. Maryland senator George L. Radcliffe said that the opening of the Bridge was "the most significant fact in the history of Maryland as far as the relations of human beings are concerned."¹⁴³ On July 30, 1952, the first cars whisked across the concrete surface of the Bridge, two hundred feet above the Bay waters. The trip took five minutes. On that same day, the last ferry sliced through the Bay waters from Matapeake on the Eastern Shore to Sandy Point in about twenty minutes time.

The dream of bridging the Chesapeake Bay had been in the minds of some Marylanders nearly fifty years before a bridge was actually built. In 1909, the Merchants and Manufacturing Association of Maryland allotted one thousand

¹⁴³ Baltimore Sun, 30 July 1952.

dollars for an engineering survey to study the possibility of a Chesapeake Bay Bridge.¹⁴⁴

Interest in a bridge waned until 1926 when private interests were given federal and state authorization to raise funds for a bridge between Miller's Island near Baltimore, and the village of Tolchester in Kent County. Funds came in slowly, and the stock market crash of 1929 ended the chances for a bridge.¹⁴⁵

In 1931 the Maryland General Assembly directed the State Roads Commission to conduct a comprehensive survey for the construction of bridges in Maryland, but World War II interrupted plans for a Chesapeake Bay Bridge.¹⁴⁶ In addition, President Roosevelt in August 1937 vetoed congressional authorization for a Sandy Point to Kent Island span, the location of today's bridges, on recommendation from the War Department which was concerned about impairment to navigation.

In 1947, Maryland Governor William P. Lane called for legislation to build a bay bridge. The legislation passed and construction began in 1949. The Bridge was completed in July 1952 at a cost of forty-four million dollars.

With the Bridge complete, "civilization" was only a five minute ride away for the Eastern Shoreman, and the Atlantic Ocean beaches were more accessible for suburban Marylanders

¹⁴⁴Kent County News, 25 July 1952.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Chesapeake Bay Bridge Commission, Report of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Commission to Governor Albert L. Ritchie, 1931.

from the western shore. In a prophetic way, Governor Theodore McKeldin warned at the dedication of the Bridge that "there will be a tendency to commercialize where there is no proper place for commercialization . . . the state government will do all in its power to prevent such an undesirable development. . . ."147

According to some Eastern Shoremen, McKeldin's warnings and promises were only political rhetoric. With little difficulty you can find people on the Eastern Shore today who will tell you, without humor in their voices, that they would gladly blow up the Bridge if that would return the Shore to its former tranquility.¹⁴⁸

Yet the Kent County News welcomed the Bridge in an editorial on July 25, 1952. The welcome was tempered with caution though -- as prophetic a plea as that uttered by McKeldin during the Bridge dedication:

The completion of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge which will be formally dedicated next Wednesday, links at long last the two halves of the state of Maryland.

From the days of the Calverts up to 1952, the Eastern Shore has been considered a geographic and political entity which was theoretically a part of Maryland, but widely separated in interests, inclination, and heritage. The first recognition of this came in 1642 when there was set up at New Yarmouth in Kent County a customs house and court to handle the affairs on the east side of the Chesapeake Bay.

Now the Chesapeake Bay Bridge is complete. This ribbon of steel . . . has conquered the bay as a

¹⁴⁷Kent County News, 1 August 1952.

¹⁴⁸Gibbons, Wye Island, p. 113.

barrier within the state. However, the fait accompli does not alter the fact that here in the Eastern Shore is Maryland's greatest heritage! We welcome the commerce and industry which this great engineering feat will no doubt bring to the peninsula. But we also cry out to all brethren to hold fast to the traditions which have made this Eden an incubator of great ideas, great men, and the fountainhead of guidance for all Maryland throughout the years!

The Eastern and Western shores of the Chesapeake Bay are linked at last! But let us proceed with caution. We don't want a bonanza, we want lasting benefits.

At the time the Bridge was built no one could really estimate the changes that might come. The Kent County News' July 25, 1952, editorial voiced concern over the boom that might occur as a result of the increased access to the Eastern Shore. The Queen Anne's Record Observer in Centreville, Maryland, noted just before the Bridge opened that:

. . . it is not desirable to have a lot of unsightly buildings and shacks spring up to impress the travelers with our lack of modern facilities and planning. The highway scenery should be beautiful and contain restaurants, filling stations and other businesses that would be a credit to our communities.¹⁴⁹

A year before the Bridge was built the Kent County News printed a long letter from a Kent County native who had moved to Connecticut.¹⁵⁰ The letter expressed concerns over the future development that might arise from additional and quicker access to the Eastern Shore via the Bay Bridge.

¹⁴⁹Ibid, p. 125.

¹⁵⁰Kent County News, 16 March 1951.

Another letter stated that,

. . . with the completion of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge rapidly approaching, it seems to me that citizens and tax payers of Kent County should give serious thought to the feasibility of enacting reasonable zoning regulations for Kent County in order that we may preserve as much as possible the wonderful way of life which exists in this county.¹⁵¹

The Kent County News, however, apparently saw no need to editorialize on the subject of either letter.

Others were worried too. Edward T. Miller, Maryland's first district congressman (encompassing all of the Eastern Shore), wrote at the time that "the invasion is under way. Maryland's Eastern Shore . . . will soon be just another part of the free state."¹⁵² He also noted that the Bridge "marks the abrupt alteration of an environment he (the Eastern Shoreman) has always known, dearly loved, and assumed would endure indefinitely."¹⁵³

Meanwhile, Bay Bridge traffic was far exceeding estimates. Traffic across the span for its first six months of operation neared the advanced estimates for a whole year. While it was predicted that 1,100,000 cars would cross the Bridge in its first year, 920,990 crossed in just six months,¹⁵⁴ and on Monday, February 23, 1953, the one millionth

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 24 August 1951.

¹⁵² Baltimore Evening Sun, 8 May 1951.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Kent County News, 13 February 1953.

car had taken the five minute ride.¹⁵⁵ The Kent County News also reported that the average daily traffic on the Bay Bridge was double that which crossed by ferry before the Bridge was built.¹⁵⁶

Being north of the Eastern terminus of the Bridge, Kent County did not experience the immediate problems of traffic, noise, and commercialism that the Bridge created. The Kent County News did very little reporting on zoning, urbanization, and planning during 1953, 1954, and 1955 -- subjects closely linked to the Bridge. During those years there were only eight articles or letters to the editor about those subjects. More attention was paid to a visit by President Eisenhower to Washington College, the explosion of a local fireworks plant, and the nationwide issue of desegregation. Although the Kent County News, like most other Eastern Shore papers, favored the Bridge because of its potential to increase the Shore's economic standard, that opinion gradually changed as the proposed spans across the Bay threatened to come to Kent County. In the next ten years, as controversy over the location of a second bridge raged, the Kent County News was to point an acerbic pen at those who wanted a bridge built to Kent County.

In a senate resolution passed on February 18, 1956, the state of Maryland said that additional bridges over the Chesapeake Bay would be desirable because "despite our pride

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 21 February 1953.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 23 October 1953.

in the magnificent engineering achievements of recent years, complete contentment remains a luxury not to be indulged in by our citizens and legislators while certain areas of the state remain inaccessible to other areas thereof except by hours of driving . . ."¹⁵⁷

The Kent County News, wary of the resolution, wrote that,

. . . the resolution would mean little to us as is the case with most similar actions of the General Assembly, had not the good senator from Calvert¹⁵⁸ located the eastern terminus of one of the proposed spans in Kent County . . .

The bridge which would touch Kent was found feasible . . . more than twenty-five years ago. Thankfully, it wasn't found practical at the time. And when, some two decades later the bridge was built, politics or practicability determined it should be erected elsewhere. We are thankful for that too.

The good offices of Senator Goldstein are appreciated and bespeak his continued interest in the county Kent . . . It doesn't make sense to us, though, to consider for ourselves a multi-million dollar span which would serve only an area from Church Hill¹⁵⁹ to Galena¹⁶⁰ and east through Delaware. Besides, and most important, we like Kent County as it is and have no desire to see any part of it despoiled by the contacts such a bridging of the bay would bring about.¹⁶¹

More than a year later, when a bridge to Kent County

¹⁵⁷ Maryland State Senate Resolution, no. 14, February, 18, 1956.

¹⁵⁸ State Senator Louis L. Goldstein, now State Comptroller of Maryland.

¹⁵⁹ Church Hill, Maryland, a town in Queen Anne's County, Maryland, about eight miles southeast of Chestertown.

¹⁶⁰ Galena, Maryland, a town in northern Kent County, Maryland, near the Sassafras River.

¹⁶¹ Kent County News, 2 March 1956.

was again brought up in the Maryland Senate, the Kent County News expressed its disapproval more stridently:

. . . we still would like to make it clearly understood that Kent wants no part of anything that will make it more accessible to outlanders . . . We like what we've got and we want to keep it that way! Everytime we see the changes -- not for the better -- the existing Bay Bridge has brought to neighboring Queen Anne's, we thank our lucky stars that the proposition to span the Bay, twenty-five years ago, from Tolchester to Miller's Island, became a victim of the depression.¹⁶² . Leave us Alone! We don't want no bridge no how!

According to William B. Usilton III, the Kent County News was "violently opposed" to a bay bridge from the Baltimore area to Kent County.¹⁶³ One of the main fears was that Baltimore wanted to expand its port facilities and make use of the deep water channel off Kent's Chesapeake shoreline. Usilton and the paper felt Kent County was better off to hold the land for agricultural and recreational uses.

The bridge issue surfaced again periodically for the next six years as state administrators warned about the coming of "megalopolis"¹⁶⁴ and the need for another Bay span. In August of 1960 the State Roads Commission planned a study of a bridge to Kent County. Calling the bridge to the county "as dead as the proverbial doornail for nearly a quarter of a century," the Kent County News said that it had some doubts

¹⁶²Ibid., 8 November 1957.

¹⁶³Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, March 1981.

¹⁶⁴Kent County News, 6 February 1960.

about the "ultimate benefits of such a bridge to people and business at the eastern terminus."¹⁶⁵

By 1962 the paper had resigned itself to another bridge, but suggested a parallel span be built. An editorial stated that "in talking and planning some thought should be given to such simple things as proper utilization of existing facilities. A second bridge, close by the first one, is an example of what we mean."¹⁶⁶

Other people, especially those living in the Baltimore metropolitan area, had different ideas. The Kent County News reported that a group known as the Intercommunity Council of Baltimore, a loose affiliation of more than two dozen community and improvement associations, endorsed an upper bay bridge with a Kent County terminus because it was essential for well rounded cultural and economic growth in the Baltimore metropolitan area.¹⁶⁷ The Kent County News directed its readers to take a stand:

Our position generally has been that Kent would be better off with its beautiful landscape unsullied by the type of construction which followed in the wake of the present bay crossing to Kent Island.

There could be mitigating circumstances though, and our advice to interested Kent Countians is to get pertinent information and make a decision, pro or con. Now is the time to choose sides -- not when the die is cast.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 26 August 1960.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 1 August 1962.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 20 February 1963.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

And choose they did. One Tolchester resident wrote a letter to the editor saying that she would be living in fear for herself and her children if the bridge to Kent was built.¹⁶⁹ The Chestertown Chamber of Commerce voted 2 to 1 in opposition to the bridge.¹⁷⁰

Even though the Maryland State Roads Commission, one year later on February 13, 1964, urged the construction of a parallel span, the Intercommunity Council of Baltimore again endorsed the upper bay crossing. The Council noted that a bridge from Miller's Island near Baltimore to Tolchester in Kent County would increase property values on the Shore as the land was opened to the Baltimore market, and that business, recreational, educational, and social facilities of Baltimore would become available to those on the Eastern Shore, especially Kent Countians.¹⁷¹

These "advantages" did not seem to alter the opposition of Kent Countians. The Kent County News reported that county farmers and retired people opposed the bridge because of the possibility of heavy traffic disturbing the "peace and quiet."¹⁷² The November 11, 1964, lead article stated that the Kent County Farm Bureau was opposed to the bridge because of its adverse effect on agriculture. The paper also reported

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 6 March 1963.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 21 August 1963.

¹⁷¹ Baltimore Evening Sun, 12 February 1964.

¹⁷² Kent County News, 30 September 1964.

opposition to the bridge from the Maryland Port Authority¹⁷³ and the Merchant Marine Institute.¹⁷⁴ Both opposed the project because of the hazards to navigation between Baltimore and the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, and because the abutments of the bridge would serve as additional accumulation points for ice which sometimes closed the upper bay region during the winter.

According to the Kent County News, support for the bridge was slight and came mostly from those interested in increasing business in the county.¹⁷⁵ William B. Usilton III also noted that some realtors in the county favored the northern crossing because of the potential for higher property values.¹⁷⁶

But the paper continued printing no-nonsense editorials about the bridge. In a sarcastic tone, an editorial related that,

There can be little argument against the opinion that traffic wise, the site adjacent to the present bridge is the practical one. However, if the idea in mind is to extend the Baltimore industrial and harbor areas to the Eastern Shore, the upper bay crossing is more logical. Kent's verdant acres then could be occupied by smoke-belching manufacturing plants, its

¹⁷³Ibid., 15 April 1964.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 27 May 1964.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 30 September 1964.

¹⁷⁶Interview with William B. Usilton III, Chestertown, Maryland, 20 June 1981.

beautiful bay shore lines broken with jutting piers,¹⁷⁷
 harboring filth-expelling, ocean going boats.

Opposition also appeared in cartoon form. A cartoon on the editorial page on February 19, 1964, depicted a bird's eye view of the Chesapeake Bay, Chester River and Kent County with a bridge from the Baltimore area spanning the county. Standing on the bridge was a man eager to parachute down to a bull's eye laid out as Kent County. The caption read, "Our suggestion to the upper bay bridge dispute: Why not let it span Kent County completely?"

That a second bay crossing was needed was obvious to both state administrators and weekend travellers. The Bridge was dangerously overcrowded especially during the summer months. From May 8 to September 18, 1965, the Bridge had to be restricted to one-way traffic 129 times on 39 separate days averaging 3½ times per day, but reaching 5, 6 or 7 times on some peak days.¹⁷⁸ By 1967 the Bridge carried half again as much traffic as it did ten years earlier.¹⁷⁹

Though the State Roads Commission favored the second bridge to be built next to the first one, and the General Assembly approved the plan, movement was slow, due especially to opposition from one Maryland congressman.

¹⁷⁷ Kent County News, 12 February 1964.

¹⁷⁸ Baltimore Evening Sun, 2 November 1966, C 28.

¹⁷⁹ Kent County News, 12 July 1967.

Clarence D. Long, (D.- Baltimore County) a strong advocate of the bridge to Kent County, in May of 1966 led a drive to petition the parallel span authorization to referendum. Long contended that the northern crossing would give Baltimore an economic shot in the arm. A question was placed on the November ballot asking whether voters were for or against a parallel span. If the voters turned down a parallel span, said the Kent County News, then "Mr. Long's confederates would have another chance to promote the bridge from Baltimore to Kent."¹⁸⁰

The Baltimore Evening Sun and the Kent County News urged voters to vote for the parallel span, but a flood of "no" votes from Baltimore County and Baltimore City defeated the question.¹⁸¹ Long immediately urged Maryland's new governor Spiro T. Agnew to initiate studies for a second bridge to be built in the Baltimore area.

While Kent Countians voted for the parallel span, the Kent County News, apparently fed up with Rep. Long's "confederates," did not editorialize on the vote. The paper reported on December 21, 1966, that a Chesapeake Bay Bridge to Kent County was a possibility in the next ten years.

Governor Agnew, however, with solid support in the

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 11 May 1966.

¹⁸¹ Baltimore Evening Sun, 27 June 1973.

new General Assembly, overwhelmingly controlled by Democrats as usual, proceeded to revive the parallel span issue. Authorization was approved as an emergency measure, passing by 88 to 50 in the House and 26 to 16 in the Senate, thus achieving the needed three fifths in each house.¹⁸²

A parallel bridge was dedicated on June 27, 1973, after seventeen years of controversy over location, and later delays due to skyrocketing costs, bad weather, and labor disputes. But the arguments over bridge-building continued with Kent Countians afraid a third bridge might still be constructed.

In 1974, almost twenty years after Louis L. Goldstein first introduced a resolution to erect a bridge to Kent County, the paper reported that the county planning commission definitely opposed a northern bay crossing. It said it conflicted with the basic goals regarding development in the county which included balanced growth at a slow rate, and protection of the county's natural beauty.¹⁸³ An editorial said:

Though we may be labelled as reactionary by some, a bay bridge is NOT what Kent County needs in our opinion . . . To many on the western shore, especially at this time of year, the Eastern Shore is Ocean City and Ocean City is the Eastern Shore. Anything in between, some of these weekend commuters feel, should be quick food shops and 6-lane highways. The ugly ribbons of concrete and macadam that lace through towns on the Eastern Shore have permanently CHANGED THESE AREAS.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Kent County News, 15 May 1974.

For their appreciation of what Kent County is and the quality of the county without the type of development that sprouts among such superhighways, the county planners have our admiration.¹⁸⁴

The same theme was echoed two years later. A July 21, 1976, editorial stated how even twin spans could not fill the motorist's needs, and went on to say that,

Two spans now link the Eastern Shore with the western shore. The Chesapeake Bay no longer serves to make the Eastern Shore 'the land unto itself' that it was for so long. It is still for most of us a special place, a land of farmer, waterman, hunter, sailor and boater.

Meanwhile, Baltimore and Washington's teeming masses want to get to the ocean beaches. Good for them. How they can stand the city even in the winter is beyond our comprehension. But unfortunately for us they have to filter through the Eastern Shore roads and across . . . the Chesapeake Bay Bridges . . .

Today the bridges remain continuing targets for editorial abuse for they enable "urban lemmings to motor to Mayor Kelly's¹⁸⁵ highrise paradise by the ocean."¹⁸⁶ Above all, for the Kent County News, the bridges threaten a way of life:

There is money to make in that ant-like humanity (ant-like in numbers and ant-like in instinct) that sprawls across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge . . . What about the Eastern Shoremen . . . I am afraid the Eastern Shoremen who have seen so much change will see a great deal more, and are going to have to sit back and take it . . . Counties will probably become laced with expressways and freeways. Small towns which have grown beautifully, rivers that have been allowed

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 22 May 1974.

¹⁸⁵ Mayor of Ocean City, Maryland.

¹⁸⁶ Kent County News, 15 June 1977.

to meander and farmland that has prospered will be changed. Remote towns and rural communities will lose their identity . . . The ant-like humanity . . . will sweep over them come spring of every year -- and it will not stop, it will not stop. Who would dare stop or at least in some way control the ant-like march to the sea?¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

"CAN POPULATION COMPROMISE?"

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge greatly enhanced communication between the two "shores" of Maryland. With this new exchange came increased pressure on the land for urban and commercial uses. Much of the development that sprouted alongside major highways was built to accommodate traffic that crossed the Bay: gas stations, restaurants, hotels. Soon after the Bridge was completed, however, developers eyed the more remote, picturesque areas of the Eastern Shore -- waterfront property and prime farmland -- as sites for housing subdivisions and businesses.

Governmental control over land use has its roots in concern about the "quality of life." In the thirty years that have been studied, the Kent County News went from a publication uninterested in suburban sprawl to one avidly concerned with zoning and development. For example, during the early 1950s there was very little reporting on zoning, increased traffic, urban sprawl, etc. By the mid and late 50s, however, the paper reported regularly on the increasing

number of housing subdivisions popping up in the county. Zoning regulations and ordinances, and their implementation were topics of extensive coverage throughout the decade of the 60s; and the Kent County News of the 70s found itself covering pollution, conservation, nuclear power, and dredge spoils dumping -- all issues that were nonexistent before the Bridge was built. The same issues spawned concern for planning and zoning to help preserve the rural, agricultural nature of the county.

The need to control developers through zoning regulations was seen by some Eastern Shore counties as an important step in protecting the quiet atmosphere of the Shore. Talbot County, centrally located, with a high percentage of waterfront property and a large number of wealthy landowners, and Wicomico County, home of burgeoning Salisbury, Maryland, were, in 1953, the first counties on the Eastern Shore to establish zoning laws.¹⁸⁸ Other counties, including Kent, stuck to their tenaciously conservative Eastern Shore guns in fear of increased governmental control, and did not initiate zoning regulations until the early and mid-1960s.

As the Bridge neared completion in 1951, a former Kent Countian wrote to the Kent County News expressing concern about the detrimental effects the Bridge would have on the county. From his home in Connecticut he wrote:

¹⁸⁸I. Alvin Pasarew, "The Legal Background for Community Planning in Maryland," Address before the Maryland Conference on Community Development, Baltimore Museum of Art, 1 May 1954.

It is a fallacy for anyone to reason that this or that area will or will not be affected by change or new transportation. No one can accurately predict when the greatest change will come in any area . . . There is noblesse oblige to let those who enjoy the Eastern Shore 50 years from now find it as good if not better than at the present. That obligation rests with the adults on the Shore today.¹⁸⁹

The letter called for zoning, land use programs, agricultural protection, adequate highways, and a parks commission. The Kent County News, however, did not editorialize on the letter but was more concerned with the pressing national issues of communism, socialism, and inflation on its editorial page of the early 1950s. Local issues, as noted earlier, did not appear on the editorial page until the late 50s and early 60s. Also, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, zoning was a back-burner issue that did not sit well with the natives because it meant increased governmental control -- something that the Eastern Shore resented.¹⁹⁰ In August of 1951, however, just days after Talbot County officials set up a zoning commission to study problems of traffic, billboards, roadside businesses and indiscriminate building due to the Bay Bridge, the Kent County News reported in a lead story that the Kent County Commissioners hoped to set up a study group for zoning similar to that in Talbot County.¹⁹¹ A week later the governing bodies of Chestertown and Betterton, a town in northern Kent County,

¹⁸⁹ Kent County News, 16 March 1951, letter to editor from native Kent Countian Paul Pippin.

¹⁹⁰ See Gibbons, Wye Island.

¹⁹¹ Kent County News, 31 August 1951.

met to discuss zoning proposals.¹⁹²

But planning and zoning was not in the news much through 1954. Zoning essentially died out as an issue, judging by the coverage it received in the paper. There were only two articles about Rotary Club discussions on the need for a comprehensive zoning plan for the county in 1953. A decision to proceed on a zoning study was not made until March of 1954 when the commissioners travelled to Harford County on the western shore, north of Baltimore, to study plans adopted by it and other Maryland counties.¹⁹³ It even took a tragedy for some area residents to see that the community might be wise to initiate zoning laws. After eleven people were killed in an explosion that rocked a fireworks plant near Chestertown, the local businessmen's association adopted a resolution requesting the commissioners to put into effect a zoning ordinance to limit the manufacture, sale, or storage of explosives within a 2½ mile radius of Chestertown.¹⁹⁴

Adoption of a planning and zoning code, however, did not take place until nearly ten years after the initial interest shown by county officials and residents in 1951. During those years, six housing developments were either being built or were in the planning stages in Kent County. The Kent County News reported in 1959, five years after the

¹⁹² Ibid., 7 September 1951.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 12 March 1954.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 27 August 1954.

first meeting with Harford County officials, that a member of the Harford County Planning Commission spoke at a meeting of the Kent County Chamber of Commerce about the need for zoning.¹⁹⁵ Not until 1960, however, did zoning and planning gain publicity and support in the county. This followed the pattern of the majority of Eastern Shore counties. Only two, Talbot and Wicomico, had zoning boards before 1960. Most counties were to initiate boards and laws in the early to mid-1960s.

As a subject of coverage in the Kent County News, planning and zoning grew by leaps and bounds. From 1953 through 1959 there were only five articles on the subject of zoning and planning in the paper. In 1960 alone there were at least seven articles and or editorials regarding zoning regulations, and by 1961 there were close to thirty articles and or editorials about zoning and planning.

By December of 1960, after hearing state, local, and private groups talk about the need for zoning, the first phase of a planning and zoning study conducted by a private firm was approved. The paper wrote skeptically:

Just what the first phase of a planning and zoning program for Kent County will do without the following phases we have no way of knowing. We suspect that a lot of the things that turn up in phase One will already be known . . . To us . . . one of the most pleasing features is that this is a start on a program for which many people, including more than a few who have no idea what planning and zoning entails, have been

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 30 January 1959.

yelling. These voices will be still for the time
being we hope.¹⁹⁶

Unfortunately, the paper seemed to have been more interested in how this would calm the voices of those desiring zoning -- the county commissioners and concerned citizens -- rather than in how the study would help the county.

In March of the following year, 1961, an Interim Zoning Ordinance was adopted by the county. An editorial applauded the ordinance but said that,

. . . the legal phraseology . . . does not commend it for light and easy reading . . . We trust that out of the wealth of legal phrases and terms someday will emerge the planning and zoning utopia some of the enthusiasts have envisioned for Kent County."¹⁹⁷

Immediately, on page one the paper began printing weekly listings of the zoning permits granted, and other news of zoning appeals. It also published the zoning ordinance map. Public interest in zoning, however, was light, according to the Kent County News.¹⁹⁸ Only sixty-five people attended a meeting on the ordinance and most were termed professionals -- real estate agents, and school, health and highway officials.¹⁹⁹ A year later a permanent zoning ordinance was given final approval by the county commissioners.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 9 December 1960.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 24 March 1961.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 21 April 1961.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

With zoning then a part of county law, officials saw the need for long range planning. The county commissioners stressed that Kent County was already being affected by the urban growth of Washington and Baltimore. In 1964, the county agreed to enter into a contract with a group of Washington, D.C. planning consultants, Harland, Bartholomew and Associates. At a cost of \$39,000, the county was to receive a comprehensive plan for land use, zoning, housing, recreation, transportation, education, cultural activities and industry.

As the comprehensive plan was underway, the city of Chestertown was also considering its own comprehensive plan conducted by the same group of consultants. The Kent County News, in its continuing skeptical fashion toward zoning, said:

What Chestertown needs and needs badly at the moment, is a people's counsel -- someone to study and state the case against the proposed comprehensive plan for the future of Chestertown. Not that we in any way oppose the proposal, but unless it is entirely different from any such proposal ever made it is sure to have some weaknesses . . . Such a counsel as we proposed undoubtedly would have to be paid -- considerable work would be entailed -- but the cost would be justified if the public had the benefit of a comprehensive study of the weaknesses if any, of the comprehensive plan.²⁰⁰

Meanwhile, a zoning ordinance for Chestertown was adopted with little opposition from the citizens, according to the Kent County News. An editorial stated that, "the unfortunate thing is that far too few people have paid any

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 1 November 1967.

attention to the proposal, despite the fact that it has been thoroughly aired."²⁰¹ After another public hearing on the ordinance was held, the paper noted that the meeting "produced a turn out of less than 30 people included elected officials . . . In the face of this apparent acquiescence on the part of the citizens the natural procedure would seem to be adoption and implementation of the code."²⁰² On March 6, 1968, a page one banner headline read, "Zoning Adopted in Chestertown."

If the function of a country newspaper is to assist the community in knowing itself,²⁰³ then the Kent County News clearly attempted to fulfill that duty in a series of articles based on the comprehensive plan for the county being developed by the group of Washington-based consultants.²⁰⁴ On February 28, 1968, the Kent County News began a series of five articles that offered readers a summary of the comprehensive plan. The articles attempted to highlight important features and sections of the plan. In an introductory statement the paper said that no attempt would be made to project opinion or analysis into the articles -- summaries were the only aim. Opinion and analysis came in the editorials also being run on the plan. The stated purpose of the series

²⁰¹Ibid., 10 January 1968.

²⁰²Ibid., 21 February 1968.

²⁰³Willey, The Country Newspaper. p. 14.

²⁰⁴Harland, Bartholomew and Associates, The Comprehensive Plan for Kent County, Maryland, rev. ed. (1974).

was to arouse the interest of the citizens in the future of Kent County so that they might read the final report when it became available and interpret it for themselves.²⁰⁵

The five articles were well-organized summaries that kept strictly to the contents of the plan. The editorials, however, were not so much expressions of opinion but soap boxes from which the paper urged area residents to take part in community affairs. This is clearly shown in an editorial regarding the comprehensive plan and a new revised county-wide zoning ordinance:

A public hearing on a proposed comprehensive plan for Kent County and a county-wide zoning ordinance will be the subject of a public hearing on Thursday June 20. We call particular attention to this meeting today by supplementing the official notice with a news story. We further make it the subject of this editorial comment and all for one reason -- we want to give it as wide publicity as possible . . . The public hearings are designed to provide the citizen with an opportunity to become acquainted with what is being proposed. Once action is taken and such plans and ordinances adopted, the only recourse is lengthy and expensive legal action. The time to be informed is before not after. The attention of all citizens is directed to this meeting and a widespread attendance urged.²⁰⁶

Thirty-four people attended the hearing. The paper excused the low attendance by saying that the proposed new plan and ordinance varied only slightly from the original plan and ordinance under which the county had operated since 1961.²⁰⁷ After a year of public hearings and proposals,

²⁰⁵ Kent County News, 28 February 1968.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 5 June 1968.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 26 June 1968.

the comprehensive plan and a new zoning ordinance were adopted by the county.²⁰⁸ Kent was one of the first Eastern Shore counties to have a comprehensive plan. Other counties, including Cecil, Queen Anne's, Talbot and Dorchester did not initiate such plans until the mid-1970s.

The adoption of a new zoning ordinance and a comprehensive plan came at an important time for the county. In 1969 the Vietnam War was in full swing, campus unrest swept across the country, and conservation groups called for a halt to pollution and for preservation of natural resources. The pages of the Kent County News reflected how the community was influenced by these nationwide issues. The reporting, though, was not about student riots at Berkeley, or casualty listings of Vietnam marines, or nationwide pollution problems, but about how local people were affected by national events.

During the Vietnam War years, for example, the Kent County News printed articles about the activities of county soldiers in Vietnam, and letters to the editor both for and against the war. An editorial condoned the peaceful demonstration of Washington College students after the Kent State shootings.²⁰⁹ Other letters to the editor battled back and forth over liberal versus conservative political issues.

But the biggest issue in the paper during these years was pollution. The adoption of a new zoning code had

²⁰⁸Ibid., 19 November 1969.

²⁰⁹Ibid., 6 May 1970.

much bearing on the concern about pollution -- a concern that spread throughout the nation and the no-longer insular Kent County. The years 1969 and 1970 found the pages of the Kent County News filled with articles about issues that never before had appeared in the paper: pollution in the Chesapeake Bay, trash in the county, preservation of wildlife habitats, and the need to keep Kent County free of heavy industry. In 1968 there were fewer than ten articles about these issues in the paper. By 1969 the number rose to nearly twenty. In 1970 almost every issue contained an article, letter to the editor or a number of both about pollution, wildlife conservation and natural resources. In the month of April 1970 alone there were four editorials, seven letters to the editor, five articles and one picture story about pollution. By April 1971, the Kent County News said that,

. . . after more than a year, hard at work impressing those who have looked on, the ecology crusaders, we think, have made their point . . . the list of personal projects is many -- plant a tree, save bottles and cans for recycling . . . have autos checked for excessive pollution, use less water, or just carry a litter bag and USE IT . . . Why not join in?²¹⁰

The first major battle directly related to zoning and pollution began in 1970 and did not end until six years later. A construction company, the Arundal Corporation, which owned land in Kent County, appealed the zoning governing its land because it wanted to mine gravel and sand. The heated appeals dispute, covered every week in the paper, generated

²¹⁰ Ibid., 21 April 1971.

much negative reaction in the county and negative comment from conservation groups. After legal action, bickering, and a great outpouring of letters to the editor, the Arundal Corporation dropped its appeals case in 1972.

The company reappeared, however, late in 1975 with a proposal for environmentally sound mining. Again the Kent County News reported the Board of Zoning Appeals decided against the company, in line with the paper's editorial stand. The paper cited traffic, noise, safety of children, pollution, and the company's desires being at odds with the comprehensive plan as reasons for the decision.²¹¹

Through the years up until 1980 the county has battled over many other zoning decisions, both big and small. Some dealt with the dumping of Baltimore harbor spoils on county land. Others concerned the building of housing subdivisions in the county and the location of shopping centers. In keeping with the county's comprehensive plan, the Kent County News always called for slow growth mindful of the need for a balance between economic forces, the environment, and a value system of smallness and community solidarity endemic to the county. Its position was stated clearly in the last paragraph of an editorial on May 16, 1973:

. . . Kent's comprehensive planning and zoning ordinance should be under constant scrutiny for errors in language and details that could keep the county from becoming a suburban wasteland someday.

²¹¹ Ibid., 16 June 1976.

And in 1976 it said:

We need economic growth but not at the price of losing our way of life. We need more industry but not at the threat of marring our shoreline and threatening our waters and air.²¹²

An editorial titled, "Can Population Compromise?," summed up the feelings of the Kent County News on the subject of land use, zoning, and agricultural preservation:

Among those who (found the shore inviting) were the growing thousands of real estate salesmen and a spat of high powered developers who feel that an essential element in the beautification and appreciation of an area is people. The high density developments that are permitted today will be the police, delinquency, economic and social problems of tomorrow . . . the pressures are on many landowners to find more income or sell, and not all can withstand the urge. We cannot praise too highly those who have resisted that urge, for that preservation of the land as it is, serves best to make Kent County and the rest of the Shore the paradise it has been for many generations.²¹³

²¹²Ibid., 4 February 1976.

²¹³Ibid., 27 June 1973.

CHAPTER VII

"DON'T NUKE ON ME"

The Kent County News has been an editorial voice for preserving a way of doing things, a way of life, that existed before the Bay Bridge. It has portrayed Kent County as having a deep sense of community, a love of natural beauty, a feeling for history, and as being a place of productive farms. The Bay Bridge was depicted as a threat to the rural and agricultural nature of the county, while zoning ordinances and comprehensive plans were seen as necessary evils for regulating land use. One issue, nuclear power, a product of the twentieth century's desire for more energy, was viewed as potentially the most threatening issue in the history of the county.²¹⁴ The Kent County News clearly helped mobilize sentiment against nuclear power in Kent County.

In 1969, amidst local articles about the search for a doctor for the town of Rock Hall, pleas for bicycle safety, and an increasing number of articles concerning pollution, there were two large advertisements in separate issues of the

²¹⁴Kent County News, 9 July 1975.

Kent County News which extolled the virtues of nuclear power.²¹⁵

Both were from the Baltimore Gas and Electric Company, and both referred to the imminent operation of Maryland's first nuclear power plant at Calvert Cliffs in Calvert County.

Earlier in the year a letter to the editor discussed the dangers of thermal pollution, the effect of dumping heated water into a lake, bay or river, and the Kent County News editorialized by saying:

Thermal pollution . . . is finally becoming noticed by the public, though the largest potential source of thermal pollution, nuclear power plants, would seem to have no obstructions against their construction and unlimited use . . . The potential effects of this plant could be more important to Maryland than any combination of fish kills, oyster diseases, and domestic pollution known previously . . .²¹⁶

By 1973, the Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant was almost complete. The Kent County News had reported sporadically about nuclear power since 1969, but the county was not directly affected by nuclear power until February 28, 1973. On this date the paper reported that the Delmarva Power and Light Company added Kent County to its list of possible sites for an electric power generating plant. A representative from the power company spoke to the county commissioners about acreage, timetables, pollution, and taxes. According to the paper, the reactions were reserved.²¹⁷

²¹⁵Ibid., 27 August and 3 September 1969.

²¹⁶Ibid., 22 January 1969.

²¹⁷Ibid., 28 February 1973.

An editorial the next week called for answers to the "searching questions" of how much effort the power company was willing to devote to the preservation of the land and waters. The editorial also asked the commissioners and residents to seek out information about the proposed plant.²¹⁸

A series of public meetings were held, all noted and reported by the paper, in which citizens heard the merits of nuclear power plants presented by public relations officers of the power company. On April 4, 1973, the Kent County News wrote a cautious and sarcastic editorial about the possibility of a nuclear power plant:

. . . many questions remain to be answered by DPL (Delmarva Power and Light Company). The spokesmen sent here to explain the company's position have been lay apologists for the nuclear cause while professing no expertise at answering the more technical questions that ensue from some (rightly) suspicious audiences . . . It has been for the Kent County Chamber of Commerce . . . to seek and obtain a real live nuclear physicist to get some of those questions answered . . . The county commissioners have kept the county in the ball game by their note of encouragement, but there's a lot more to be learned about DPL and nuclear power plants too.

The possibility of a nuclear power plant in Kent County did not generate much response, negative or positive, in 1973 because, according to the paper, no one really believed a nuclear power plant would be built in the county. Late in 1973, however, it was reported that the county was being investigated by the Maryland Department of Natural

²¹⁸Ibid., 7 March 1973.

Resources Power Plant Siting Program,²¹⁹ and that the Still Pond Neck area of the county was one of the three sites that was being considered.²²⁰ Under the terms of the Siting Program, the state studies potential power plant sites, buys the land after it has been deemed suitable, and then sells it to a power company.

While the state was pursuing its survey of the Still Pond area, local opposition increased. The Kent County News reported in a lead article on May 22, 1974, that "nearly 150 persons, many of them openly hostile, gathered at the Better-ton American Legion Home last Thursday for a public information session . . . which ended in a stormy one hour question and answer session." Kent Conservation, Inc., a local conservation group, said the plant was not compatible with the residential, agricultural and water-oriented environment of Kent County, and asked Governor Marvin Mandel to place a moratorium on surveying future nuclear power plants until the hydraulic model²²¹ of the bay was built.²²² Kent watermen opposed the power plant because the Still Pond site was

²¹⁹ Ibid., 5 September 1973.

²²⁰ Ibid., 28 November 1973.

²²¹ An hydraulic model of the Chesapeake Bay, designed to study currents, salinity, and effects of pollution, was first discussed in 1965. Kent County lobbied heavily to have the model built in the county, but a site was eventually chosen in Queen Anne's County near the Bay Bridge. The scale model was completed in the mid-1970s and is open to the public.

²²² Kent County News, 19 June 1974.

a nursery ground for young fish, and a Chestertown doctor cited possible health problems in connection with the plant. Editorial opinion in the Kent County News about the power plant was more forceful:

. . . we tend to view it as not in the best interests of Kent County to seek a pig-in-a-poke such as this . . . If the power plant idea has any merit then let's hear why from persons qualified to explain what benefits it will bring to this county. In the meantime, like our fellow citizens we are forced to wait for the explanation we deserve.²²³

According to the power plant siting survey, approval of the Still Pond site was probable by the end of 1974 pending the final decision of the state secretary of natural resources, James B. Coulter.²²⁴ With that information, a Kent County News editorial spoke eloquently in a statement against the plant:

Kent County lies outside the Boston to Richmond urban megalopolis. It is open space and nature's world. Woods, rivers, trees, plants, and animals exist here. They need little to exist, but man needs more. Man needs 'power' and 'energy.' People need energy. The question is how much; and Kent's need is not that of Annapolis or of the United States or North America. Man has embarked on an extensive program to increase power production by 25% by 1980 and 50% by 2000. The question comes down to simply not whether Kent County wants a power plant or not, but whether a nation needs a power plant in Kent County, Maryland. . . .²²⁵

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid., 16 October 1974.

²²⁵ Ibid., 30 October 1974.

Three weeks later the Power Plant Advisory Committee of the Siting Program agreed to postpone the decision until more local opinion could be heard.²²⁶ The paper ended the year with this clear cut comment:

. . . The simple truth is that Kent County will have to pay the price tag and the ultimate return lies inestimable in what Thomas Wolfe described as "that inscrutable maw of chance we call the future."

Mankind stalks the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It is the last refuge on the Atlantic seaboard for farmland, for unpolluted rivers, for wildlife and waterfowl, but because it is the last refuge it is also vulnerable; vulnerable to power interests, political interests, industrial interests concerned with supplying energy.²²⁷

January 1975 began with the Kent County News telling people to express their feelings about the nuclear power plant at an upcoming public meeting;²²⁸ reporting that several hundred people jammed the courtroom in a five hour meeting with state officials to express opposition;²²⁹ noting that it planned a simple yes or no poll asking readers if they favored the plant;²³⁰ noting that two of the county commissioners were against the plant while the third gave only conditional support;²³¹ and most importantly, reporting that despite such heated negative reaction in the county, the

²²⁶ Ibid., 20 November 1974.

²²⁷ Ibid., 4 December 1974.

²²⁸ Ibid., 1 January 1975.

²²⁹ Ibid., 8 January 1975.

²³⁰ Ibid., 15 January 1975.

²³¹ Ibid.

Power Plant Siting Board recommended to Secretary Coulter that the state purchase the 661-acre Still Pond site.²³² Wind of the county's strong opposition (the Kent County News poll showed 81 percent against by February 1975)²³³ penetrated to the western shore when the Washington Post printed a long article about the battle in Kent County, and of the visions being conjured up by many residents of ecological disaster, nuclear holocaust, and armies of hard drinking construction workers.²³⁴

While the fight over the power plant continued to brew during the early months of 1975, the Kent County News took time to descend from the clouds of controversy and wrote about one of the county's most populous residents, the Canada goose.²³⁵ This editorial is noted because amidst the hubbub of the nuclear power issue the Kent County News saw the need to "familiarize" its content and make it understandable to its readers. The nuclear power plant was a local issue, but an issue propagated by the "power interests, industrial interests, and political interests" of non-Eastern Shore residents. The Canada goose was something Kent resi-

²³²Ibid., 22 January 1975; and Maryland Regional Planning Council, "The Status of Power Plant Sitings on the Chesapeake Bay," April 1975.

²³³Kent County News, 5 February 1975.

²³⁴Washington Post, 9 February 1975, D1, D6.

²³⁵As noted earlier, about 200,000 geese winter in Kent County each year. The county is part of the natural migratory routes of the geese.

dents more easily related to. All of the aspects of what a country weekly traditionally includes -- local contents, local names, local concerns, are covered in this editorial, "Food for the Gander:"

No one doubts for a single minute when November rolls around and the honker is in the sky and Bud Hubbard's is packed to the gills with hunters in the wee hours that the Canada goose is one of Kent County's greatest economic assets.

But now that hunting season has passed and all the decked out New York stockbrokers have drifted back to Gotham, who cares about the geese? Most farmers don't and we can't blame them. The honker has an insatiable appetite. Over the past 2 months he has been devouring wheat fields after a weather perfect fall enabled farmers to pick their cornfields dry.

The Canada Goose, however, deserves to survive and prosper. He is an Eastern Shore asset. We like the idea Bob Coe of the Millington Wildlife Refuge recently put forth. He suggests that farmers plant a cover crop for geese. In that way Kent County can feed its asset.

Will we remember him in February as we remember him in November?²³⁶

By July 9, 1975, after further study by the state, the Kent County News reported that natural resources secretary Coulter felt that the "additional time for contemplation had solidified" the choice for the Still Pond land as the site for a nuclear power plant. With the power plant almost assured of coming to Kent County, the paper calmly noted that it was a time for "cool heads:"

In the face of controversy we call for calm . . . We all want reasonable conclusions. We are not an unreasonable people, despite our tendency to be stubborn. Yes, we probably are damn stubborn Eastern Shoremen, but we are damn proud to be Eastern Shore-

men.

The heart of the matter is that everyone in his or her own right has deep feelings about his or her life in Kent County. The possibility of a nuclear power plant here is as great an issue as this county has seen since a small band of Englishmen rowed the Chester River from Kent Island in days of old and set foot on Kent County soil. Let us go forward with understanding, with cool heads prevailing, seeking the answers, the illusive facts, in an age when energy needs compete with needs of a small group of people who feel strongly about the place they live.²³⁷

Three weeks later, in an abrupt change, Secretary Coulter postponed the decision saying he wanted to reexamine the issue.²³⁸ In September of 1975, the Kent County News reported that the state was not "keen" on the Still Pond site because the united opposition in the county forced them to look elsewhere.²³⁹

But the possibility of a nuclear power plant in Kent County was not over. In 1977 the Maryland Department of Natural Resources published a "Major Facilities Study" which identified forty-two potential nuclear power plant sites on the Eastern Shore.²⁴⁰ A number of the candidate sites were in Kent County due to the county's access to deep water, low potential for groundwater contamination, and foundation stability. On June 29, 1977, the Kent County News reported that

²³⁷ Ibid., 9 July 1975.

²³⁸ Ibid., 30 July 1975.

²³⁹ Ibid., 24 September 1975.

²⁴⁰ Department of Natural Resources. Major Facilities Study: Eastern Shore Power Plant Study. Annapolis, Md.: Energy and Coastal Zone Administration, 1977.

an area around Tolchester was selected as one of the four areas on the Eastern Shore to emerge for further study.²⁴¹

That same day, the paper said:

The news came like a bombshell . . . After all the shouting, feinting, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, the Still Pond Neck site appeared lost in the shuffle . . . Money and jobs are the hypnotizing tunes the power plant pied pipers play. It is a very old story . . .

Rural, quiet, 'off the beaten path,' 'out of the rat race,' Kent County could be jerked unwillingly into the pell mell, lemming-like, ant-like life of the east coast megalopolis despite the fact that practically everybody in Kent is living here because they want to escape the rat race.

The paper wrote that it was like "old home week for an hour and a half in the Kent County Commissioners hearing office"²⁴² as residents, many of whom fought against the Still Pond site, listened to state experts talk about the Tolchester site. Weekly columnist Pleasanton L. Conquest III, wrote:

. . . now the faceless, numberless hordes of atomic savants, bolstered by state and federal alphabetic agencies, are back once more, this time the locale is to be in or near Tolchester. More attorneys, more bi and tri focused experts; more flourishing of papers, diagrams, decrees . . . We are saddened and disgusted by the prospect that lies before us all, but we have lived here long enough to know the innate toughness of the people of Kent County . . .²⁴³

²⁴¹ Site in western Kent County bordering on the Chesapeake Bay. The area was originally the site of a large amusement park and picnic facility used daily by hundreds of vacationers who took the steamboat from Baltimore. The park fell into disrepair and today is the site of a marina.

²⁴² Kent County News, 17 August 1977.

²⁴³ Ibid., 24 August 1977.

Anti-power plant forces banded together. Citizens Opposed to Power Plant Sites, COOPS, was formed. The Chester-town mayor, council and Chamber of Commerce voted against the power plant. The Kent Farm Bureau opposed the site because of the amount of productive farmland that would be taken up. The Kent County News again advised all concerned readers to attend the public hearings.²⁴⁴ Two weeks later the state withdrew its recommendation of the Tolchester site saying that by 1990 the population density in a thirty-mile radius from the plant would be too great.²⁴⁵ The study also noted that the potential disruptive effects were probably at their extreme in Kent County as opposed to the other Eastern Shore sites under consideration.²⁴⁶

Today there is no nuclear power plant in Kent County. There is no nuclear power plant on the Eastern Shore. As a postscript, in the aftermath of the Three Mile Island incident, the Kent County News wrote:

What happened in central Pennsylvania at Three Mile Island nuclear power plant over the weekend could have happened here and still may happen if the exponents of nuclear power would have their way. The tragedy is that they misled us before, misled us then, and probably will continue to mislead us -- and in that we all lose our humanity -- in the quest of a 'cheaper' energy source, large profits for certain groups of men, jobs for others and comfort at a risk for all.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 14 September 1977.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 28 September 1977.

²⁴⁶ Department of Natural Resources, "Major Facilities Study," 1977.

²⁴⁷ Kent County News, 4 April 1979.

And the editorial cry heard in 1976, during the furor caused by the power plant issue, was a slightly altered version of the colonial cry, "Don't Tread on Me:" "Don't Nuke on Me."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸Ibid., 4 February 1976.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Over the years the Kent County News has presented an intimate picture of life in Kent County, portraying a society in flux -- a rural oasis that has tried to deal with pressures from an expanding megalopolis. By geographical fate, Kent County was isolated from the outside world due to water that surrounded three sides of the county. When the two shores of Maryland were linked on a blistering July afternoon in 1952, Kent County lost some of its isolation and began to feel the touch of spreading urbanism.

The Kent County News printed stories and editorials about what this abrupt introduction to the twentieth century meant to the county. The possibility of a bay bridge to Kent County surfaced periodically during the thirty year period and received an editorial tongue lashing. Zoning, seen initially as a necessary evil, was covered reluctantly because of the paper's belief that the less governmental control in life the better. A nuclear power plant was

viewed by the paper as the greatest threat to a way of life in the county since its founding in 1642.

While the Kent County News reported and reflected on broad forces and trends at work in the county, it continued to deliver personal reports about the closely-knit community. Over the last thirty years the Kent County News has presented thousands of these quaint reports from local correspondents. Readers learned about families on vacation, or the bridge party in Still Pond, or the Women's Club meeting in Galena, or that Mr. _____ lost a calf. On page one they also discovered, for example, that the commissioners of Betterton had purchased a "Bosler Fogging Machine" and were determined to spread death to the insect population. By printing such items the paper acted as a bulletin board for events of a social, political or economic nature. It also let people know what their friends and neighbors across the county were doing, and acquainted community leaders with the activities of other leaders.

Consequently, the paper presented a rich human story -- one that could not be duplicated in the pages of a large metropolitan daily. Furthermore, the paper kept one eye on the county's rich heritage and the other on the impact of the present to promote the community while not losing sight of the people and events that had gone before. For example, as shown in earlier chapters, the paper commemorated Kent County newspapering in editorials and frequently

emphasized county historical events in other editorials and news stories. The "From Our Early Files" feature on the editorial page helped to give the community a sense of identity and continuity. The paper used the historical perspective to portray itself as a constant and ever-present part of life in Kent County. In doing this, the paper fostered pride in the community.

Additionally, the paper appeared to be an educator -- especially for issues that were new and confusing to rural residents. This was evident in the paper's printing of the county's complete zoning ordinance and map, and the publishing of amendments as they appeared; in publication of a series of articles that summarized and clarified the comprehensive plan for the county; and in publication of articles about state siting studies for nuclear power plants. The Kent County News continually expressed the view that only by being informed could citizens make intelligent decisions on issues that affected the whole county.

The three issues examined, especially the nuclear power dispute, also shed light on the paper's appearance as a pillar of stability around which the citizens could rally. The Kent County News took a solid stand against the power plant but also acted as an arbitrator in the controversy. The paper called for cool heads. It demanded clear answers. It polled county attitudes. It pushed for attendance at public hearings. It accurately reported the facts

of state siting studies. In the end it spearheaded opposition to a nuclear plant and won its case.

Thus the Kent County News seemed to be a bulletin board, an educator, and a stable "eye" in the center of a crisis. In addition, it stressed local affairs both of a personal and county-wide nature. It asked people to carry out their duties as citizens, and called for calm in times of tension.

As the county faced potentially disruptive changes in its physical and social makeup over the last thirty years, moving from a provincial community to one more affected by the "outside world," the paper itself faced parallel changes. These changes transformed it from a sleepy weekly to a modern corporately-owned newspaper. The effects of this were both obvious and subtle. As outlined in earlier chapters, the paper's editorials gradually focused more on important local issues in lieu of comment on national and international news. Reporting of hard community news appeared more on the front page as personal notes moved inside. Design became more horizontal, with variety in headline size, fewer stories and more photographs on page one. Advertising also became strictly local during this period.

Other effects were more subtle. Since the sale to Whitney Communications Corporation, it appears the editor may have lost some control over his product. As noted

earlier, Deringer is wary of acting as an independent crusading editor because he must first consider the economic impact of such crusades. In addition, Deringer apparently does not want to "bite the hand that feeds him" by expressing opinions on what he considers the harmful effects of corporate power and technology on small towns and weekly newspapers.

Chain ownership has also forced the paper to be more aware of business and finance. Its lifeblood flows from making money for the chain. As Usilton noted, editors of chain-owned papers have to be careful about finances or risk getting the "boot from upstairs." Answering to an "upstairs" outside the county is something relatively new to the Kent County News. Until the sale to Whitney, the paper had only to answer to itself and its readers, not to any group outside the county.

While the county grew and felt the impact of the twentieth century, the paper turned into even more a publicist for the virtues of small-town life defined as neighborliness, friendship and community spirit. Even though owned by a large chain the paper promoted an ideal grounded in almost two hundred years of local ownership: Pride in the community, stability, service, and belief in the value of people. That the paper had a small-town tone before the sale is beyond dispute. But since chain ownership began in 1975, it has been a rare week that offered no editorial which, in some fashion, praised the small town and the rural

community. It is evident that in the last thirty years the paper has felt the forces of modernization but outwardly has tried to herald the rural and the individual.

This may be due in part to a belief by the editor that as the county became more a part of the megalopolis, and as the paper's chain ownership continued, the values of smallness and intimacy had to be reiterated. It appeared that the editor continually tried to reassure the readers that the paper was theirs even though its final chain of command was in New York City. The paper banked heavily on the personal qualities of small-town existence in order to stay in tune with its rural readers. And in keeping with its history as an important, individual force in the community, the paper decried what it viewed as the impersonality of the megalopolis and the forbidding atmosphere of urban, corporate America. Again, one can speculate that this was an attempt by the paper to remain steeped in local character and input while granting ownership to outsiders. In light of the evidence shown in the preceeding chapters, the Kent County News has striven to retain its distinct individuality in a world which tends toward conglomeratization and sameness.

This conclusion calls for more study. Future researchers might want to examine other weekly newspapers recently bought by chains to see if they too have become more local in scope and have attempted to promote their

community more since chain ownership.

In addition, the Kent County News provides an example of how a weekly newspaper has advocated controlled growth, conservation of natural resources, and preservation of a rural, agricultural community. The county's economy centers around agriculture, hunting, and the fishing industry. Uncontrolled growth in housing, population and heavy industry had the potential to destroy fertile farmland and wildlife habitats, and to spoil county waterways. The Kent County News has been opposed to such intrusions on the land and rallied county resistance. This position has been consistent with the power structure of the community as reflected in the goals of the county planning commission.

At the same time, the paper appears to have been an important actor in the socialization process, or the binding together of the community. While the paper has presented factual information in its news stories, it also has promoted and developed community consciousness or community harmony. In the zoning debate, for instance, editorials called for concerted effort on the part of all citizens to become aware of the regulations and become involved in decision making which affected the quality of life in the county. In addition, during the nuclear power dispute the paper created a community solidarity against the plant with its editorials about the threat to a way of life and with its role as a public forum. This helped instill a community consciousness because it let people know publically how

fellow countians felt.

Finally, it seems that over the decades this country weekly has been more than a bulletin board, more than a source of social information, and more than a supplier of canned news -- characteristics readily attributed to country weeklies by past researchers. The Kent County News has presented a picture of a rural community beset by a modern society on the move. As the county changed, so did the paper, particularly in the past thirty years; but intimacy and a personal quality, staples of both the county and paper, have remained.

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