

Funny Local Names And How They Got That Way

Have you ever visited Bell's Oven, Eliza's Flat or Sikes Island?

There is a possibility that the reader is in one of these locations at this moment. Anyone in Belle Haven is in a town once called Bell's Oven. Greenbush was once known as Eliza's Flat and Sikes Island is what we call Saxis.

With information gathered from Kirk Mariner's *Nothing Ever Happened in Arcadia and Virginia Place Names, Derivations and Historical Uses* by Raus McDill Hanson, some of the Eastern Shore's more interestingly named towns and the origins of these names, according to these sources, are here.

Of course, many of the familiar Shore names can be traced to the Indians who inhabited this precious land before the white man arrived. Chincoteague took its name from the tribe, Cingo-Teague, which means "Beautiful Land Across the Water."

Another Indian name which has been bestowed on one of the Shore's communities is Assawoman. This word means 'rock cave.'

Of course, Accomac, once known as Drummondtown, was named for a tribe of Indians, the Accomacs, which once inhabited the Shore. The name means 'other side of the water place' or 'the other side place.'

Another name, Pungoteague, came from the Indian word *pungotehew* meaning "sand fly river." This name dates from 1660.

There is no record of the name of Tangier Island until 1713. According to *Visitors Guide to Tangier Island, Virginia*, by Stuart Lehmann, the island's name was possibly given by Captain John Smith who visited in 1608. Legend has it that Capt. Smith named the island after the city in Morocco where he was once held captive. It is thought that the Indian's clay pots reminded him of the pottery (*tanja*) from which the African city drew its name.

The Matchapungoes were a large tribe of Indians on the Shore. The town of Machipongo can attribute its name to this group. The name means 'bad dust' or 'much dust.'

Several of the towns took their names from people who served as postmasters there. Bloxom was named for an early postmaster by the name of William E. Bloxom. Daugherty had postmasters by that name for more than 40 years. There were two postmasters in the northern Accomack community of Horsey whose last name was just that so the name stuck. Kitty Mears was postmistress of the town, Mears, that was later named for her.

Some towns came by their names honestly and rather obviously. Atlantic was named for the ocean.

Belle Haven's name can be traced to the early 18th century. According to the story, a Mr. Bell had a habit of baking in a large outdoor oven so the place was called Bell's Oven. Another possibility is that the town was named for a plantation nearby which had the same name.

Greenbackville's name also has an interesting history. According to one story, in the late 19th century land around the area was once going for \$100 an acre. Supposedly, someone thought this was a bit much for the marshy land and made the statement, "That shouldn't be called land, it should be called Greenback." Greenback here refers to a slang term for U.S. currency issued in 1862.

By 1872, Greenback was a booming town and in 1874, Lloyd F. J. Wilson was made the village's first postmaster and the post office was opened in his store. He is given credit for calling the town Greenbackville.

Also in the area of northern Accomack County is the small community of Horntown. According to Mariner's book, in 1744, Daniel Gore, who lived near Swan's Gut Creek, petitioned the court for permission to clear a new road from "a place called the Hornes." This is the first reference to the name.

Later, in 1759, Elizabeth Stockley was licensed to keep an ordinary (hotel) at her house in the community called the Hornes.

Traditionally, however, the name came from the habit seafood peddlers had of constantly blowing their horns to advertise their wares to the housewives of the village.

Another story about Horntown has it that two branches of Savage Creek there resemble a pair of horns. There seems to have been quite a bit of speculation and controversy over the origin of the name.

Before it became Greenbush, the town located West of Accomac was known as Eliza's Flat. When Stewart Mathias bought the local store the name changed. According to tradition, he named the place from an evergreen bush.

The town of Craddockville was named for the first rector of St. George's of Pungoteague whose name was Craddock. Another town named for a person is Mapps-ville. This Accomack County community was named for a store owner by the name of Samuel Mapp.

Although General Robert E. Lee was not a native Eastern Shoreman, one of the towns here was named in his honor. Lee Mont is supposed to have been named for the great Civil War leader.

Because of the locust trees in the area, Locustville received its name. Because of its supplies of oysters and clams, the Northampton County community became known as Oyster. There is also a community called Clam, for other obvious reasons.

Many towns of the Shore, as in the West, originated after the coming of the railroad. Often these towns were named for railroad officials. Painter was named for an officer of the Pennsylvania Railroad as was Melfa. According to the story, it was uncertain whether his name was spelled M-e-l-f-e-r or the way the town has interpreted it.

Keller, which was formerly Pungoteague Station, was named for the contractor who built the rails through the community. Exmore was supposedly named such because it was the "tenth station on the railroad south of Delaware."

The county seat of Northampton has a long history. It has been the location of the courthouse since 1680. Once known as Peachburg, another name for this area was "the Hornes" for two branches of a creek which formed something that resembled horns. The present name

explains the location of the town which was 'east of the other settlement.'

Before 1890, Willis Wharf was called Bigelows Wharf. In 1854, Edward L. Willis bought the land and the town's name was derived in this manner.

A house built after 1820 near the present location of Wardtown was known as Ward House. It was owned by Alexander Wales Ward and the town was named for him.

Cheriton was also known as Town Field and Sunnyside. A landowner in the area, William Stockley, was the originator of the name "Cherry Stones."

Modest Town has an interesting legend about the origin of its name. Supposedly, two prim ladies kept a boarding house there when the town was a stage coach stop and post office. Tradition says the town was named for them. Court records mention a place called Helltown just one mile west of Modest Town which gave travelers and residents two points of view.

The town of Parksley, which was a planned community, was named for a landowner by the name of Edmund Bailey Parkes.

The town of Temperanceville was called Crossroads until 1824. At this time, four landowners sold land in this area with the provisions that whiskey should not be sold there.

As is evidenced, many of the Eastern Shore's town names still carry the traditions and history that are so abundant on the Shore. So, when one wonders, what's in a name, the answer could be a wealth of history and legend.



Parksley, shown above in the 1930s, was named for a local landowner.



Accomac, seen during court day in the '30s, was once named Drummondtown but its name was changed to that of a local Indian tribe