



Calvert County Environmental Commission

Calvert County's Environmental History

1. What was Calvert County like during the ice ages?

During glacial times, most recently around 25-20 thousand years ago, the area of present Calvert County was covered by a boreal forest, similar to what is today found in Labrador, Canada. Locally, during the coldest time, there may have been park tundra—clumps of black spruce, tamarack, and jack pines interspersed with tundra. There was no Chesapeake Bay back then—the Susquehanna River flowed where the shipping channel is today, around 150 feet below present sea level. After a warming period to near present climate conditions, ice age climates returned 12,800 years ago and lasted to 11,300 years ago. Presumably woolly mammoths thrived here during glacial climates.

2. When did people first visit what is now Calvert County?

Hunting parties probably crossed through present Calvert County by at least 13,000 years ago (Clovis culture), and plausibly already by 15,000 years ago (Pre-Paleo Indians). Earlier arrivals are speculative.

3. What kind of animals lived in what is now Calvert County when people first set foot here?

The oldest known encampments date from 9,500-9,200 years ago (Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum and Pig Point further up the Patuxent River). It seems likely that this was about the time tidewater advanced this far up the Patuxent River, allowing easy upstream and downstream travel by canoe, as well as giving access to new seafood resources.

4. When and where did the earliest Native Americans live in what is now Calvert County?

The first people encountered a variety of animals which later became extinct. In our region, these ancient animals included dire wolves, sabre-tooth cats, mastodons, giant ground sloths, large-headed llamas, giant beaver, and short-faced bears, besides existing species like black bears, whitetail deer, and wolves. There were also large predatory and carrion feeding birds, species which also went extinct around 12,800 years ago for reasons still being debated.

5. How many people lived in what is now Calvert County when Captain John Smith explored the Chesapeake Bay and Patuxent River in 1608?

In the summer of 1608, Smith mapped about six Native American hamlets along the Patuxent shore of what is today Calvert County. He also noted the number of able-bodied fighting men. Taking a reasonable multiplier gives a total population of a few hundred, probably about 300 men, women and children.

6. What kind of animals lived in what is now Calvert County when English colonist arrived?

The animals present then included species now either extirpated (wolves, mountain lions, and black bears) and three bird species now extinct (ivory-billed woodpeckers, Carolina parakeets, and passenger pigeons). An occasional elk may have wandered into the area from the Piedmont.

7. What animals became extinct as a result of English colonization? Which ones just became extirpated (locally extinct)? Of those, what animals have been restored or have come back on their own?

Ivory-billed woodpeckers, passenger pigeons, and Carolina parakeets became extinct, while black bears, wolves, white-tailed deer, turkeys, mountain lions, and probably also beavers and ground hogs were extirpated by English colonists, probably by the early to middle 1700s in Calvert County. After World War II, ground hogs and beavers returned, while deer and turkeys were reintroduced in the late 1940s (deer from Wisconsin) and middle 1970s (turkeys).

8. When was Calvert County founded?

Calvert County was founded in 1650 and first named Charles County. On 3 July 1654, it was renamed Calvert County. Then on 20 October 1654, it was renamed Patuxent County. In 1658, the name, Calvert County, was restored; but 1654 is considered the official 'birth year' of the county.

9. Who are some famous people who have lived in the County?

- Arthur Storer, first Astronomer in the American colonies
- Louisa Adams, wife of U.S. President John Quincy Adams
- Margaret Taylor, wife of U.S. President Zachary Taylor
- Roger Brooke Taney, Chief Justice of U.S. Supreme Court
- Tom Clancy, author
- Dr. Thomas Turner, Dean of Johns Hopkins Medical School
- Hon. Louis Goldstein, State Senator and then Comptroller
- Thomas Johnson, first Governor of post-colonial Maryland (1777-1779)
- William Sampson Brooks, Author, and 44th Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church
- Simeon Booker, journalist and author
- Charles Ball, autobiographer of influential slave narrative
- Dr. Thomas Parran, Jr. 6th Surgeon General of the US

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