

## The Early and Continuing Importance of Waterways

The earliest transport routes in Maryland, followed the courses of least topographic resistance, whether overland or waterborne. The Piscataway Indians of the Algonquian group as well as their less pacific neighbors to the north, the Susquehannocks, were canoeists and trailmakers of long experience at the time of the first European settlement of Maryland by Virginia adventurer William Claiborne on Kent Island in 1631 (Brugger 1988:10-12). The many navigable rivers and streams of the Chesapeake watershed were known to the Native Americans and constituted the primary means of access into most parts of Maryland below the fall line during the settlement and early colonial eras. Early travelers' accounts, such as those written by Jesuit missionary Andrew White and Cecil County settler Augustine Herrman, all emphasize the general availability of water transport, while deploring the lack of reliable overland routes (Hall 1967:25-46, 131-135, 309-332). Some Indian trails were still in place during the colonial era; the "Seneca Trail" linking the Potomac and Susquehanna crossed the present lower Patapsco near Elkridge (Travers 1990:27) and early Baltimore and Cecil county court records and deeds refer to "old Indian roads" in those counties (Marye 1920, 1921).

Reflecting pioneers' customary reliance on navigation, no map of the Maryland colony prior to the 1755 Fry and Jefferson map of the Chesapeake area depicted roads (Quinn 1982:296-297). Despite the relative ease of waterborne travel, however, a large overland transport network, complete with some major post routes and an array of county roads, developed during the first century of European settlement (1631-1750). From an early date, the General Assembly acted to facilitate transportation among the many farms and towns founded in response to Maryland's popularity among English and (beginning in the early eighteenth century) German emigrants. A 1637 act for public ports was refused assent by Lord Baltimore, but in 1639 the legislature chartered a "ferry upon St. George's River," the main waterway into the early St. Mary's settlement (Riley 1905:8-9). In 1658, the county courts, already recognized as important Maryland transportation planners, were authorized to "establish ferries where necessary and to appoint ferrymen" (Riley 1905:31). Regular ferry service was also the subject of a 1664 law and much subsequent legislation (Riley 1905:38).