

## AN OSSUARY NEAR PISCATAWAY CREEK

ALICE L. L. FERGUSON

WITH

## A REPORT ON THE SKELETAL REMAINS

T. D. STEWART

THE ossuary described in this paper is believed to be at or near the site of Piscataway Fort. Piscataway Fort is of historic interest for it was there, in 1634, that Calvert obtained permission from the "Emperor of the Piscataways" to begin the actual settlement of Maryland.

It is thought that until 1623 the principal town of the Piscataways was at Moyaone on the Potomac just below the mouth of Piscataway Creek. In 1623 Governor Wyatt of Virginia burned Moyaone and the principal site of the tribe was probably moved to Piscataway on the south bank of Piscataway Creek two or three miles east of Moyaone.<sup>1</sup> We know that Piscataway Fort was an important place in 1634 and it continued to be the headquarters of the Piscataways, the most important Indians on the Maryland side of the Potomac, until 1680.

Among the things found in this ossuary were some jetons issued in England between 1630 and 1640 during the reign of Charles I. The site of the ossuary checks so well with the land records and the jetons check so well with the known dates of Piscataway Fort that it seems safe to say that this ossuary must have been close to the actual site of the fort.

In 1634 a band of two hundred people led by Lord Baltimore's brother Governor Leonard Calvert, sailed on the *Ark*, a boat of three hundred tons and on a pinnace, the *Dove*, of only fifty tons, and came to America to take possession of Lord Baltimore's new province of Maryland. The little company of adventurers first landed at Point Comfort in Virginia where they stayed several days. At this time they met Captain Claiborne who already knew the country where they intended to go. Claiborne confirmed the reports that they had already received in England that the natives might not be friendly. Two days after they left Point Comfort they came to the Potomac and sailed up the river to an island which they called Saint Clement's which was their first landing place in Maryland. Here they were advised not to make a settlement until they had obtained the permission of the Emperor of the

<sup>1</sup> Ferguson, Alice L. L. *Moyaone and the Piscataway Indians*. (Privately printed, Washington, 1937.)



oughly burned bone fragments of a young male adult. Most of the fragments were so small that it was impossible to identify them, but almost all the supraorbital bones were found. The actual cremation had not taken place in the ossuary, for the mass of charcoal, fine ash and burnt bones had sifted in among other bones which showed no sign of having been even scorched.

As in the ossuaries found on the neighboring site of Moyaone, the number of skulls was too great for the number of other bones. Apparently the skull was the most important part of the burial, and received the most careful attention. A skull properly prepared for burial always had a toe bone in it, frequently a rib or two and sometimes all the stray bones that could be jammed into it. Occasionally so many bones were forced into a skull that it was broken from the inside. Beads were found in some of the skulls but in this ossuary the complete necklaces were found outside the skulls and not in them as at Moyaone.

No arrow points or pipes were found in the ossuary and very few potsherds. There was a perfect celt ten inches long and two fossil shark teeth. As in the ossuaries near Port Tobacco,<sup>6</sup> probably contemporaneous with Piscataway, there were abundant trade objects and in general there was a marked similarity between the things found at the two sites. Apparently the objects found at Piscataway were richer and more varied, as would be expected if Piscataway was the seat of the emperor, and Port Tobacco that of a tributary king.

The most abundant trade objects were little glass beads of a turquoise blue color. Over three pints of these were recovered. A great many of them were extremely small, of the size that is used for bead embroidery. These small beads were also found in red, white, blue and black but the blue greatly predominated. There were a few light blue iridescent Venetian beads and a half dozen large beads with red and blue stripes on a white ground (Plate I).

The real wealth from the ossuary was the trade copper. Seven hawk bells of the ordinary size were found as was a much larger one which had something wrapped around it, probably leather. There was a strange copper coil and also two wrapped pieces of copper very suggestive of finger rings (Plate V, *a*). Near the edge of the pit there was what had probably been a crude leather pouch filled with the bones of a very young infant, tubular copper beads and parts of a string shell beads. Scattered all through the ossuary there was a great abundance of copper tubular

<sup>6</sup> Graham, William J. *The Indians of Port Tobacco River, Maryland, and Their Burial Places*. (Privately printed, Washington, 1935.)