

Turtle-Y Fine Park

By Judy Colbert

The Terrapin Nature Park, in the Bay side of Kent Island and north of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, encompasses 276 acres and is known as Terrapin Beach and Terrapin Nature Area.

Some may think the area's nomenclature culminated from a magical place where terrapins lay eggs, and concerned citizens watch over them to prevent predators from eating the eggs or grabbing the babies as they emerge from the nest.

But under closer scrutiny, that's not the way it happened. The land's written history goes back to when the Ringgold family owned all of Kent Island, says John Bernard Ringgold, Jr. Many generations later, the family is still here—you might know him from J & D Ringgold and Sons Seafood in Kent Island Estates.

Family trees and online genealogy sites mention Col. Thomas Ringgold, known as "Lord of the Manor (Huntinfield Manor) on the Eastern Neck," Major Thomas Ringgold, II, and other family members. Maj. Ringgold died in Maryland in 1686. The Ringgolds are buried in the small fenced cemetery on the property, reachable via a short detour off the main path. There are three headstones and footstones, and a fourth stone, believed to be another footstone, all surrounded by overgrown underbrush.

Fast-forward a few centuries, and by the 1970s, the farm was in the hands of the Legg family, said Char Legg, and "they farmed corn and beans. They sold the property to investors in 1972, when the second Bay Bridge was completed." According to Legg, actor James Arness was part of the investor's group. When the land was transferred, there was an "old milk house, pump house, barn, and farmhouse. They used to be standing until the 1990s, I think. After our grandparents and parents passed away, most of us children moved to other parts of Queen Anne's County due to heavy Bay Bridge traffic."

A lifelong resident of the County said, "The Western Shore Development Corporation wanted to build 1700 high-rise condos and other high-end residences." They would also provide land for the treatment plant, design, and even build it.

Of course, they would have access to the plant for their development, which they called Terrapin Beach! The county commissioners and public works director didn't go along with the deal or subsequent deals.

After years of nothing happening, property ownership was transferred to the County in a public auction on November 27, 1978. The Chesapeake Bay Business Park (including the world-famous PRS—Paul Reed Smith Guitar Factory), the treatment plant, and the Terrapin Nature Park ensued.

Per the County's description, this award-winning 276-Acre Park features a 3.25-mile oyster chaff walking trail that meanders through wildflower meadows, 73 acres of wetlands, tidal ponds, woodlands, and 4,000' of shoreline along sandy beaches. Dogs on a leash are allowed. Restrooms are available, and fishing is permitted in designated areas. During your walk or bike ride, you can park in one of the two observation blinds overlooking the tidal ponds and see herons, osprey, bald eagles, woodpeckers, or swans. Elsewhere you might see deer



or bullfrogs. The Park connects to but is not part of the Cross Island Trail.

On the inanimate side, you can look for sea glass, pottery shards, and other items that wash ashore. For edibles, look for mulberries, particularly around June. There's a gazebo, benches, and a wheelchair-accessible boardwalk. The maximum elevation is 22', it can be muddy after rain, a little buggy during the summer, and the potential of jellyfish is possible seasonally in the water and on the beach (park rules suggest you not go into the water in any case).

Over the years, the Park, open daily from sunrise to sunset, has been home to such small and large events as weddings, a Chesapeake Bay Wine Festival celebrating the state's wines, youth fishing derbies, American Heart Association Heart Walk, beach clean-ups, and the Dark Hallows Haunted Trail. Yet, the Park is relatively empty most of the day.

And you can see an unusual perspective of the Bay Bridge and the potential for spectacular sunset photos.

Roughly a decade ago, GPS coordinates were installed throughout the Park for location purposes, particularly for emergency services. Markers post every 500 feet, and should you need help, you can identify their number and color.

Note it's a Nature Park, so there are no coolers, grills, open fires, alcohol—or shade umbrellas.

Terrapin Nature Park, 191 Log Canoe Circle, Stevensville, MD 21666.

(410) 758-0835.

Judy Colbert is the author of *It Happened in Maryland*, and *It Happened in Delaware*, Globe Pequot Press.

Correction: In the July issue of *Kent Island Neighbors* Historical Tidbits, we misspelled Tilghman Hemsley's name. We apologize to our readers for this error.