

Ewell
Smith Island
Public

19th and 20th
Centuries

The initial patent for Smith Island dates to 1679, when 1,000 acres were surveyed as "Pitchcroft" for Captain Henry Smith, the island's namesake and a prominent figure in early Somerset County history. Henry Smith first appears in county records in 1669 as having relocated from Accomac County, where he was drawn into divorce proceedings by the Virginia court. Despite his marital problems in Accomac, Smith assumed prominent roles in Somerset as a justice of the peace, a captain of the militia, and a representative from the county in the Lower House of the Maryland General Assembly. Although he owned the large "Pitchcroft" tract, it is thought Smith actually occupied a tract patented as "Smith's Recovery," located on the south side of the Manokin River near the confluence of King's Creek.

Tax records indicate the island was occupied during the eighteenth century, and Dennis Griffith's map of Maryland, first drawn in 1794, indicates what was probably an earthen fort at the north end of the island. The presence of the fort as well as the island's strategic location at the bottom of the bay encouraged British occupation during the Revolution and later during the War of 1812.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, it is thought no more than 100 people occupied Smith Island, but as in most watermen's communities, the population expanded around the turn of the century. In 1861, Reverend J.A. Massey described the islanders:

The inhabitants of Smith's and Tangier's Islands may almost be called an amphibious race; for nearly all the men and boys spend fully half their time. . . on the water. Canoes, skilfully hollowed out of pine logs, and constructed with due regard to the purposes intended, are very numerous. They are rigged with two masts, with sails attached, which can be easily taken down or put up, and can outsail every vessel on these waters, that is not propelled by steam. When there is not sufficient wind for them to sail, the islanders are very dexterous in managing them with paddles.

Methodist camp meetings have played an important part in the history of Smith Island. As early as 1808 religious gatherings were held at Tangier and probably shortly afterwards on Smith Island. At Ewell the same location has been continually used for such meetings since 1887 and has been incorporated formally as "The Wilson Butler Camp Ground." By the early twentieth century the Ewell meeting ground included thirty frame cottages and a 1,000-person auditorium. The camp increased in size until a fire destroyed the church, parsonage, and meeting ground complex in 1937. During the following years these buildings were rebuilt.

The buildings that comprise the small village of Ewell include many two-story, two- and three-bay frame dwellings, some of which date from before the Civil War. One of the oldest houses to stand until recent times was the house called Pitchcroft, located at the north end of the island.



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Smith Island, Somerset Co., Md.
Harbor
8/86, Paul Touart, Photographer
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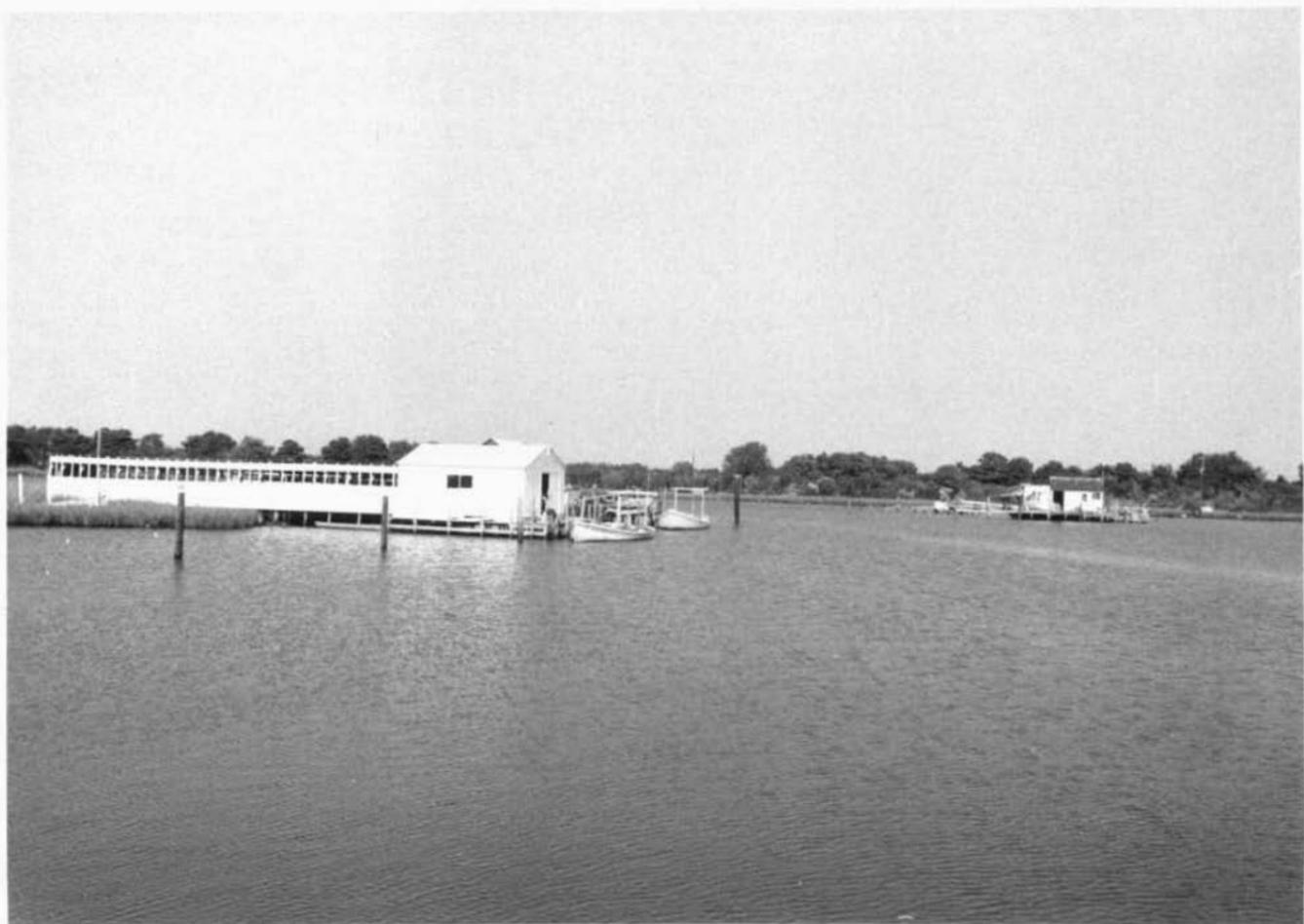
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Ewell Survey District S-333
Ewell, Smith Island, Somerset Co., Md.
Ewell Methodist Church
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Ewell Survey District S-333
Ewell, Smith Island, Somerset Co., Md.
Store - West Elevation
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Ewell Survey District S-333
Smith Island, Somerset Co., Md.
"Pitchcroft" - Outbuilding - Southwest
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Smith Island, Somerset Co., Md.

"Pitchcroft" -

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