

Tantallon History

Tantallon takes its name from Scotland's fabled "Castle Tantallon". For more than six centuries this once mighty fortress towered defiantly over the gray and forbidding waters of the Firth of Forth. Castle Tantallon epitomized all that was gracious and elegant in Scottish life. The great halls rang with merriment and here the most important people in the realm were entertained by their noble hosts, feasting and dancing. Today the castle is in ruins, inhabited only by the ghosts of long dead kings and queens, dukes and earls, counts and knights. An ancient Scottish tradition is still maintained however, for here was established a modern country club with one of Scotland's most challenging golf courses. Curiously, the golfing attracts more visitors than the historic ruins. The name "Tantallon" is of Celtic origin, first coming into general prominence in 1651 when Oliver Cromwell raided and captured the castle. The name has since been memorialized in Sir Walter Scott's novel *Manmion* and Robert Lewis Stevenson's essay *The Lantern Bearers*.

Appropriately it was a Scot -- a famous golf course architect named Jim Thompson -- who was responsible for the creation and naming of the Tantallon Golf & Country Club which would become the focal point of the Tantallon area. Fresh from a visit to his homeland, he had seen and admired the club and golf course situated near the castle and envisioned an equally challenging course on the gently sloping hills bordering the calm Potomac River. The area he chose was also rich in history.

In 1608 John Smith sailed up to what is now Fort Washington looking for the Northwest passage to India, and in 1634 Lord Calvert sailed the *Dove* into the area to negotiate with the hostile Piscataway for settlement rights. Lord Calvert deemed it unwise to settle so far up the Potomac, doubtless remembering the fate of Jamestown, so he sailed back down the river and established his colony at St. Mary's. The importance of the up-river location was recognized however as he caused a fort and garrison to be established in 1645 on a promontory at the junction of the Potomac River and Piscataway Creek, exactly where Fort Washington stands today. The tract of land which includes Tantallon legally came into existence in 1654 when Oliver Cromwell deeded it to his physician, a Doctor Barber. When Dr. Barber had the land surveyed in 1658, it was full of deer, foxes and wolves. The property changed hands a number of times during the next three centuries but the area remained essentially a quiet backwater of the nation's capital. This all changed in the 1960s, as a group of businessmen, incorporated as the "Isle of Thye Land Company" began to develop, improve and offer for sale building and estate sites situated around what is now the National Golf Club at Tantallon. The Tantallon logo appeared in 1961 and land covenants were recorded with the county in 1963. The development as originally conceived was grand -- there were to be two eighteen hole golf courses and all residents were required by covenant to be members of the then Tantallon Country Club. During the late 1960s, the Board of Governors of the country club acted as the citizens association in respect to community matters. These functions were separated in 1969 as the Tantallon Citizens Association (TCA), a dues-supported organization, was organized and the first issue of the newsletter published. Today, the newsletter remains the major communication tool for the community, announcing TCA meetings, resident news, and working to maintain the character and ambiance of the area. It has been a strong voice in creating the Broad Creek Historic District, encouraging quality development, supporting Harmony Hall (with its Tantallon Community Players), and working for controlled growth along the Indian Head corridor.

Presently, about 1000 families live in the area (see map next page). The establishment of National Harbor overlooking the new Wilson Bridge has enhanced Tantallon's attractiveness as a wonderful place to live.