

## GOVERNOR J. MILLARD TAWES REMINISCES

By: J. Millard Tawes

In the year 1891 Crisfield, Maryland was known far and wide as the Seafood Capital of the U.S.A. We had more than sixty-five seafood packing plants which contributed greatly toward the economy of not only Somerset County, but to the entire lower Eastern Shore. Crisfield offered a ready and stable supply for fish, crabs, oysters, clams, and diamond back terrapin. These products were shipped out

by rail to all parts of the Eastern Seaboard and as far west as Denver. The supply came from what seemed to be inexhaustible sources: Chesapeake Bay, Tangier Sound, Pocomoke Sound, and their tributaries.

Crisfield was also the leading port of entry on the entire Atlantic Coast based on the registration of vessels in the U.S. Custom House. Oysters were harvested by the use of dredges and shaft tongs. This was hard laborious work, especially the shaft tong method in which the work was performed by hand. Dredges were used by large sailing vessels using hand winders of the windlass type. There were large fleets of both dredge and tonger vessels.

These oyster fleets were equipped and maintained by three blacksmith shops located along the waterfront. My father, James B. Tawes, (1864-1939), operated a blacksmith shop at that time. He thought there should be a better and easier way to tong oysters and proceeded to make a better set of oyster tongs. In 1891 the U.S. Patent Office issued him a patent on his invention which was later known as "Oyster Patent Tongs".

These new tongs worked like a charm and there was such a heavy demand for them that he engaged many blacksmith shops as far distant as Cambridge, Md. to manufacture them. Even this would not supply the demand. The quantities of oysters harvested increased by leaps and bounds. This lasted about two years, at the end of which time the Maryland Legislature outlawed the use of the patent tong in all Maryland waters because it was found that the device was committing too much damage to the oyster growing bottoms.

Several years later, the use of the patent tong was legalized in certain areas of the State where shaft tonging was not practical, particularly in deep water areas. Today, the original patent tong is still in use but has been improved upon by operating them hydraulically which has eliminated much of the hard work involved.

I was born on April 8, 1894, three years after my father's patent tong invention. I was the second son of James B. and Alice Byrd Tawes. My brother, Wellington, was then five years of age and is still active at the age of 87 years. My childhood days were spent in this thriving, busy, hustling, and somewhat prosperous waterfront community. In addition to the numerous seafood plants, there were five sewing factories which employed hundreds of women on a permanent and steady basis.

Crisfield at that time boasted five drug stores, six or seven physicians and numerous retail establishments. There were three movie theaters, several churches, lodges, and business men's associations. There were at least three lumber mills and building materials outlets. Crisfield was really a rapidly growing community and the envy of the entire Eastern Shore.

During my early years, unemployment was no problem and everyone worked who wanted to work. The factories paid about a dollar per day. Oyster shuckers were paid twenty cents per gallon compared to today's \$2.65. Oysters could be purchased at retail for twenty-five cents per quart which is considerably lower than today's price of \$4.50.

We had oyster pie every Sunday for dinner. Consequently, on Saturday morning it was my job to go to Jerry Early's oyster house for a quart of oysters. He always gave a big quart by first very carefully measuring out that amount and then throwing in a pint for good measure; all for twenty-five cents.

I thoroughly enjoyed my early days in Crisfield and will always have fond memories of those days, especially the school years. At that time discipline and study was the rule in every classroom. The only school I attended in Crisfield was the old wooden Crisfield Academy which was built in 1876 and torn down in 1937. Schools in those days were from one through the eleventh grades. All eleven grades were taught at the old Academy. I can still recall all my teachers: Blanche Holland, Annie Milbourne, Addie Handy, Edward Collins, Spencer Stull, and our principal, (professor) Frederick Gardner. All have gone to their rewards.

At the age of six years I started to school. My first desk-mate was Sam Saltz, the son of Max. In those days two pupils sat together at the same desk. Sam and I started out at school together and we have been very good friends and have kept in contact with each other since that time.

The last of my teachers to survive was Annie Milbourne Stull. In 1958, upon learning that I had been elected Governor, she wrote a letter to me indicating how happy she was that one of her fourth grade students of the class of 1904 had reached the Governor's office. I had presumed that she had passed away several years previously. I contacted her and found that she was living in Frederick, Maryland. Many years ago she married Spencer Stull who was the manual training teacher at the old Crisfield High School. I visited her in her home in Frederick and it was a great reunion after more than fifty years had elapsed. After that, I kept in touch with "Miss Annie" and sent her red roses each year on her birthday until she died in 1964 at the age of ninety-three.

Another good friend of my high school days was the late Stanley L. Cochrane (1894-1918). We both attended Crisfield High School after which he went to Ohio State College and I went to the Wilmington Conference Academy, now Wesley College in Dover. Later we both went to school in Baltimore; he to the University of Maryland Law School and I to Sadler's Bryant and Stratton Business College. We roomed at the house of Stanley's aunt, Mrs. Florence Tull Coulbourn (1856-1944) on Harlem Avenue. Her daughter, Mary Coulbourn Littleton, is a resident in the Salisbury Parson's Home at the present

time. Stanley and I finished college about the same time and both decided to return to Crisfield.

Upon getting situated in our old home town, Stanley opened a law office and I went to work for my father as bookkeeper in his lumber and building material business. My salary was \$12.50 per week, which was good pay in 1913. Stanley did well as an attorney. Edwin "Coopie" Tawes and I managed his campaign for State's Attorney before he was twenty-one years old. Even though he did not quite make it, he made many political friends and would have become an important political leader had it not been for World War I.

Stanley came to our home one Sunday morning to say goodbye. I never saw him again. He was to report for duty at a camp in New Jersey before going overseas. He did not live to see the Armistice signed. He was killed as a tail gunner in an airplane just eleven days before the war ended. He was buried in Arlington Cemetery. I lost a good friend and Crisfield lost a young man who had the promise of becoming one of our brightest and successful citizens. Our local American Legion Post is named in his honor. In addition, an ocean going tug boat, built in the Crisfield shipyard for the War Department during that war, was named "Lieutenant Stanley L. Cochrane".

In December 1915, I married Avalynne Gibson, and was still making \$12.50 per week. We decided that Crisfield was the place we were going to make our home. The young people of those days had a wonderful outlook on life. There was more than enough activity to keep them busy, such as moonlight sails, hay rides, parties, dances, swimming at Old Island, moving pictures and much more. Crime, drugs, vandalism, and juvenile delinquency were almost unheard of and what little there was, was dealt with severely. There were no radios, televisions, and similar luxuries that we take for granted today. In fact, there were very few automobiles. Almost every man rode his bicycle to work.

Churches were usually filled on both Sunday morning and evening. Sunday School was a very important part of church activities, especially for the bringing up of children. In the Sunday School I attended there were more than a hundred young men in attendance each Sunday. Those were good old days. I am glad I came along at a time to become a part of Crisfield's early life. It was a very enjoyable experience.

Avalynne and I had two children. The first to come along was our daughter, Jimmie Lee, who grew up and married Raymond Wilson. They have a daughter, Lynn, born in 1950. The second was Phillip W. who married Peggy Lou Unziker. They have three children: Wesley, born 1946; John Willard, born 1951; and David, born 1955.

As a young man in the business world I was associated with my father and brothers. We enjoyed a fair amount of success. My

father was very active and took great interest in his sons. He made sure their employment was closely associated with him. This close relationship continued until his death in 1939. He was a leader in the community. He was actively engaged in the lumber business, canning business, ice business, electric business, and other activities. He was president of the Chesapeake Can Company as well as the Tawes Baking Company. At the same time he was a leader in the Asbury Methodist Church.

In 1930 I was elected Clerk of Court for Somerset County and served in that capacity for eight years. In 1938 I was elected Comptroller of the Treasury of Maryland and served eight years, after which I served as State Banking Commissioner for two years. From 1948 through 1958 I again served as Comptroller of the Treasury of Maryland.

In 1958 I became a candidate for Governor and was elected. I was re-elected in 1962 for another four year term. Maryland law prohibits a third term. It was the impression of many that following the governorship, we would live in the area of Annapolis. We liked Annapolis very much but there was no question that we were moving back to our home in Crisfield and spend the remainder of our days among our neighbors, relatives, and friends...those wonderful people with whom we started life and who so steadfastly supported me each and every time my name appeared on the ballot for public office.

Now, at almost 83 years of age, the pace has slowed considerably, but the spirit, as well as my affection for Crisfield and the surrounding community, and its good people, is greater than ever. The future outlook for Crisfield and Somerset County looks good and even though the seafood industry has lost much of its former stature in the over-all economic plan, there is being generated among our people the need for more employment opportunities and more industry. A deep water port is needed to bring about a much needed boost in the economy of the area. We have some very valuable industries but need more. Our hospital is about to start a building program toward complete renovation. All this should have the full support of every citizen.

I have enjoyed living in Crisfield. I would not want to live any place else. It has been a wonderful experience. We have one of the few remaining unspoiled areas in the country which we feel is a paradise for us and for those who wish to visit with us. Our fishing is unexcelled. We have a million dollar Marina. There are tours to both Smith and Tangier Islands. We can match most any area in hunting, both wildfowl and small game. We have more playgrounds than we have children to play on them. We have the Janes Island State Park right at our back door, with both camping and water sports facilities; and, we have much more. Above all, we have the friendliest home-town people that you would ever want to meet. Who could ask for more?

I hope to be around for several more years during which time I hope to see many good things take place in the form of progress to provide a good job for everyone who wants to work, a good home in which to live, and a bigger and better Crisfield in which to live, work, and play.

J. M. T.

ADDENDUM BY AUTHOR:

J. Millard Tawes did not quit public life after his second term as Governor of the State of Maryland. From 1967 to 1969 he served as Chairman of Maryland's Board of Natural Resources and from 1969 to 1971, as the head of a newly created State Department of Natural Resources.

In the year 1972 he was a candidate for Democratic National Convention and won. This was his 11th consecutive National Convention. Thus, he participated in the nomination of all Democratic presidential candidates from the first term of Franklin D. Roosevelt through the 1972 election.

In 1973 an Honorary Doctorate Degree was conferred upon him by St. Mary's College of Maryland. Also during that same year he was sworn in as State Treasurer, having been appointed by Governor Mandel to succeed John A. Luetkemeyer who retired. He served in that capacity for two years and after the age of 80. As State Treasurer he is believed to have accomplished something that has never been done in the history of Maryland, that of filling all three seats on the Maryland State Board of Public Works: Governor, Comptroller, and Treasurer.

He has for quite some time had the distinction of being listed in the national publication "Who's Who In America". His wife, Avalynne, has always been referred to by Crisfielders by her first name. She would be equally charming in the company of factory workers as she was as the gracious hostess at the Governor's Mansion when she was the First Lady of the State of Maryland.

Regardless of his many titles, his eight years as Governor and his many accomplishments, Crisfielders have always referred to him as just plain "Millard". This is not meant as disrespect but as a token of affection, because they like him. Millard would have it no other way. In his presence however, by the same token of affection, most still address him as "Governor".

He still maintains his Crisfield office in the same location as it has been for many years and with very little change. He is always busy and appears to be vigorous as ever even though he will soon be 83 years of age. He has not decreased to any great extent his attendance at social affairs, his speeches, or his participation in public events and celebrations. We wonder if he will ever retire. How one man could accomplish so much in one lifetime is truly amaz-

ing. He is regarded as a local boy who made good but never outgrew being a Crisfielder.

W. T. Wilson

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#### WILLIAM I. TAWES - "JENKINS CREEKER"

William I. Tawes was born before the turn of the century on the Jenkins Creek Road near Crisfield. He was the son of Fred and Nancy E. Tawes. He experienced the rugged life of the crabber and waterman of the period of the early 1900's. His family was typical for people who "followed the water" in those days. Life was not easy. He, along with his brothers Fred, Jr., John Paul and Roy, worked hard for everything they received. Most things were up-hill. Life's bounty in material things was meager indeed. They knew what it was to go barefooted, and to shove a skiff by hand, to catch crabs by the "mudlarking" method and on many an occasion experience disappointments by returning home with not one penny earned from a full day's work on the water.

Each of the brothers made good in entirely different fields of endeavor. Fred, became a maintenance superintendent for Delmarva Power and Light. John Paul retired as an Army Colonel and is now a professor at the University of Oklahoma. Roy became Dr. Roy Tawes, Minister and District Superintendent of his church district. He made quite a name for himself in the field of religion. Among his children is Dr. Roy Tawes, Jr., surgeon at the University of California Medical Center.

William, the eldest of the four boys had it the roughest of all. It befell his lot to help his father wrest a living from the sea to feed the remainder of the family. He was a natural born waterman. This calling was in his blood for countless generations. While still little more than a boy he captained his own skipjack in what he called the "Creek Country" of Crisfield. After becoming weary of the austerity that the life of a waterman offered, he worked his way through college to become a school teacher majoring in Manual Arts. He received his Bachelor's Degree, his Master's Degree, and would have earned his Doctorate had his studies not been interrupted by World War II, in which he served as a commissioned officer. Returning from the war he resumed his school work and became Chief School Officer of his school district in Delaware from which he retired in 1962.

He did not retire to rest or to "rust" but has engaged in many activities such as writing books, wood carving, painting, and sculpturing. In his spare time he also operated a 64 acre farm near his home in Millington, Maryland, near Chestertown.

In his first book, "God, Man, Salt Water and the Eastern Shore",