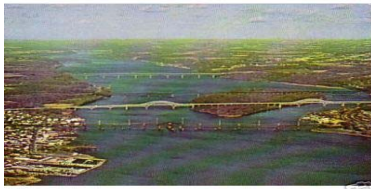


# All About Havre de Grace, MD

## Starting with John Smith:

The City of Havre de Grace traces its origin with the voyage of John Smith in 1608 as he sailed up the Susquehanna River. John Smith in discovering Havre de Grace, happened upon the Susquehannock (Iroquois) tribe of Indians. They were described as "the most noble and heroic nation of Indians - large & warlike and for the most part seven feet tall - voices deep and hollow as coming out of a cave - stately and majestic - great warriors."



*Susquehanna River*

**Crossing the River:** In 1658 settler Godfrey Harmer purchased 200 acres of land that he called Harmer's Town. That tract is the heart of the present-day Historic District of Havre de Grace. The Lower Susquehanna Ferry made its first crossing of the river from Harmer's Town in 1695; remained in operation for 170 years.

## Our Interesting Name:

August 29, 1782, Marquis de Lafayette, noted in his diary, "It has been proposed to build a city here on the right bank and near the ferry where we crossed it. It should be called Havre de Grace." He was impressed by the town's resemblance to Le Havre, France. The citizens took his advice, and three years later (1785) incorporated the town as The City of Havre de Grace.

In 1976 Lafayette was honored with a statue that

stands at the main downtown portal, looking toward the ferry crossing that brought him to the place he called "Harbor of Grace."

## HdG-Our Nation's Capitol?

By 1783 the new town had seven houses and a warehouse. In 1798, there were 40 houses here. In the interim, Havre de Grace had been a candidate for both the county seat (1787) which was moved from Bush to Bel Air, and the Capitol of the United States. In 1789 the House of Representatives voted as to the permanent location of the capital. It was tied between Havre de Grace and Washington DC. The deciding vote, cast by the Speaker, was for Washington.

## John O'Neil vs. The British:

During the War of 1812, Havre de Grace, was attacked by fifteen barges of British soldiers on May 13, 1813. Heroically, John O'Neil, a member of the local militia, single-handedly attempted to defend Havre de Grace with cannon and musket fire. Wounded by the recoil of his cannon, O'Neil was captured and was to be hung by the British Admiral. Matilda, his young daughter, rowed out to the Maidstone to plead with tough old Admiral Cockburn to spare her father's life. Her request was granted but Havre de Grace was burned to the ground, in this the Second War of American Independence on the Western side of the Susquehanna River.

**Canals & Commerce:** In 1839, a very important waterway, The Susquehanna & Tidewater Canal was opened. The Canal, which stretched from Havre de Grace to Wrightsville, Pennsylvania, was a great service to early settlers in conveying timber, coal, and wheat, cementing the town's dominance as a commercial intersection. The

Canal was comprised of twenty-nine locks, serving as stairways or elevators for the canal boats.



*Susquehanna Lockhouse Museum*

During the intensely cold winter of 1852, railroad tracks were laid across the ice of the Susquehanna from January 15 to February 29<sup>th</sup>. Trains were hauled across car by car with no injury to person or property. The construction of the first railroad bridge across the Susquehanna (pilings still visible adjacent to the Amtrak bridge) was completed in 1866 and stayed in use until 1939.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Dubois Lumber Company covered several acres of land on the waterfront, as did the Seneca Cannery. Fish packing houses, ice plants, and a feed mill dotted the shore line. Inland were textile mills, a shoe factory, and a carriage factory. Today, the Seneca Cannery building is the most prominent reminder of the town's own "industrial revolution."

## A Heritage of Horse Racing:

Havre de Grace received national attention for its thoroughbred racing at the Graw (1912).



*The Havre de Grace Racetrack*

The Havre de Grace Racetrack (1912-1952) was considered to be one of the best racing strips of the American turf. The most memorable day in its history was September 29, 1920, when the

# All About Havre de Grace, MD

greatest of thoroughbreds, Samuel D. Riddle's Man O' War, ran in the Potomac Handicap. "The Graw" was the main training ground for owners who had hopes of winning the Kentucky Derby. The track is now the property of the Maryland National Guard

In 1928, the Conowingo Dam was put into operation. Located three miles upriver, it was the greatest development, steam or hydro, ever constructed in one step in the history of the power industry.

## **About our Ducks & Decoys:**

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century also focused attention on the sporting life, fishing and waterfowl gunning. Some of the best duck hunting in the world was along the Susquehanna Flats, shallow water located at the head of the Chesapeake Bay.

A cottage industry emerged with the hand-carving of look-a-like ducks or working decoys used to lure the live birds within shooting range of the hunters. The sport declined in the late 1960s as ducks became less plentiful and strict regulations were placed on the bag limit. . Many craftspeople now carve decoys for decorative purposes. Hand carved decoys are quite a collectible form of folk-art. Havre de Grace, the self-proclaimed "Decoy Capitol of the World" has an outstanding Decoy Museum.



*Decoy Museum*

**A Turning Point:** During the 1970s the city began to evaluate its needs and

potentials. Today, the recreation opportunities, the historical buildings and magnificent location of the community are being appreciated and developed.

## **Revitalization of the 1980s:**

The 1980s saw hundreds of volunteers involved in the revitalization of the City. This continues today in the museums and committees responsible for various festivals and improvements to the downtown and other activities held throughout the year.



*Concord Point Lighthouse*

**Sights to See:** The Stepping-Stone Museum, Concord Point Light and Keepers' House, the Decoy Museum, Maritime Museum and Susquehanna Museum at the Lock House all became viable and important tourism attractions for the city and collectively tell the story of Havre de Grace. In the 1990's, Havre de Grace became one of the busiest communities in Maryland when it comes to festivals, events and cultural activities. The completion of the Promenade a ¾ mile long waterfront boardwalk, and an influx of new specialty business have brought a new vibrance to the business community. Our close relationship with the Bay can be appreciated at places such as Tydings Park, Hutchins Park and the City Yacht Basin which is home to the Skipjack Martha Lewis-one of the last

working oyster dredge boats on the Chesapeake.

**Population:** The City of Havre de Grace has a population of 14,593 with approximately 5,404 housing units. Havre de Grace continues to expand its employment base during the 21st century with a labor force of 5,792. The population will be growing significantly over the next decade as new housing developments will attract thousands of newcomers to town.

**Major Employers:** The last decade alone saw the arrival or expansion of such notable firms as Smuckers Quality Beverages, Cello Corporation, J.M Huber, Coca-Cola, Vulcan Materials, Constar Plastic, Aberdeen Proving Ground, and Harford Memorial Hospital.

The future looks very bright for this small town on the Chesapeake Bay that many say is the "best kept secret in Maryland".

**For More Info Contact:**  
**Tourism & Marketing Mgr**  
**Brigitte Peters, 410-939-2100**  
**[www.hdgtourism.com](http://www.hdgtourism.com)**