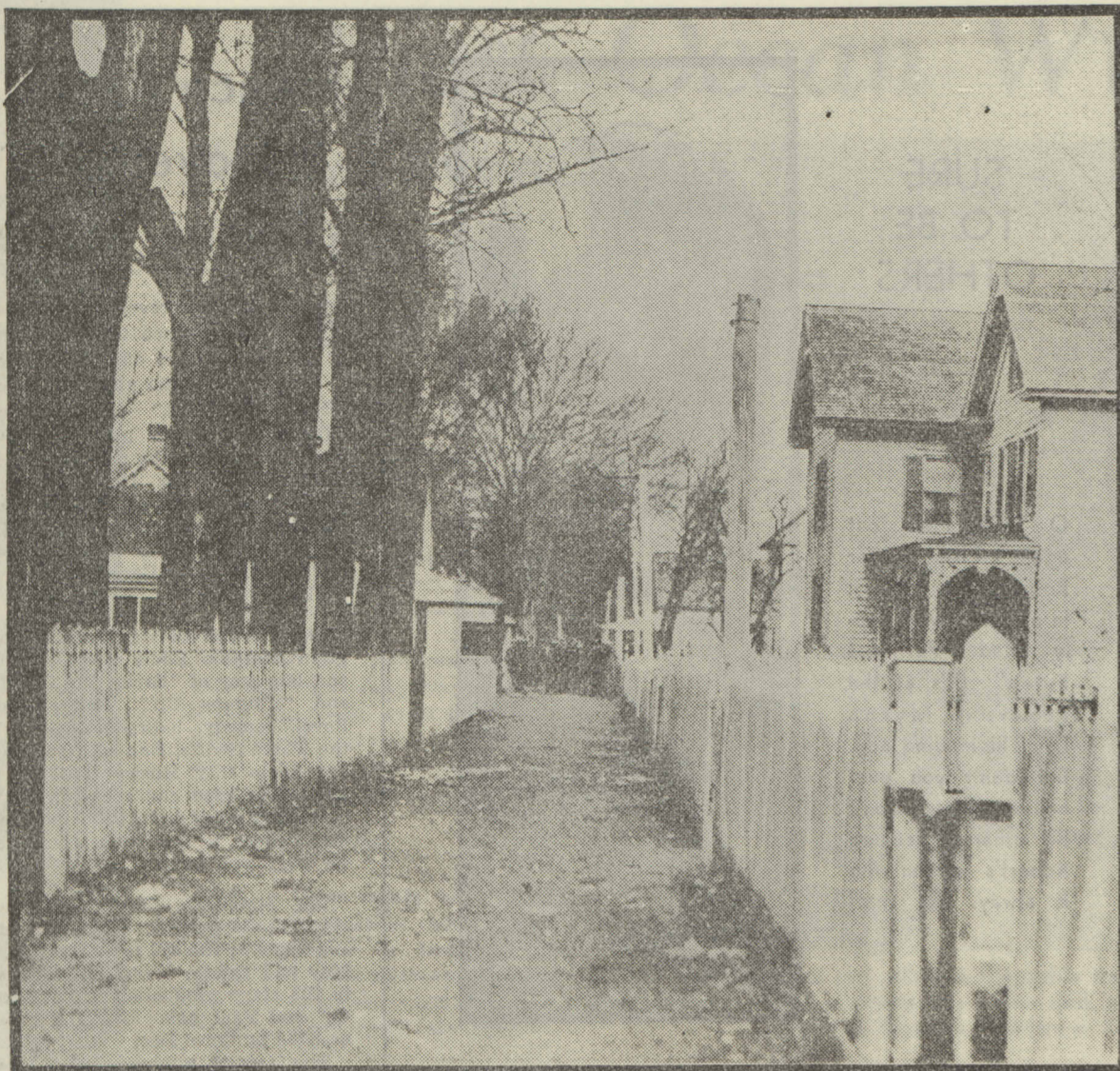


# Quaint Tangier Island - Passed Up by Progress



One of the narrow streets in the quaint fishing village on Tangier Island. A number of the streets are only eight feet wide. There are no automobiles on the island. (Acme photo.)

## Curious Chesapeake Bay Community Where 18th Century Customs Prevail

By WILLARD EDWARDS

Washington, D. C.

**C**RUISING up the broad expanse of Chesapeake bay some 328 years ago, one Capt. John Smith, a restless, roving spirit happily unaware that legend was to ignore most of his exploratory feats and accord him his greatest fame as the love interest in an Indian maiden's career, cast a bright and curious eye upon a low-lying strip of sand well out of sight of either shore.

Although the Pocahontas episode has been scoffed at by modern historians, this Captain Smith was undoubtedly a romantic fellow. He apparently saw in that desolate bit of sand a reminder of his exploits in the eastern world, because he solemnly dubbed it Tangier Island and sailed on his way. So far as is known the African Tangier long remained unaware of this honor, and perhaps still is.

The tiny island had nothing but its fanciful name to distinguish it during the next century and a quarter. Fishermen grew acquainted with its outlines because it was in the center of one of the best crab and oyster beds in the world. Not until 1730 did a group of canny Cornishmen consider the idea of establishing residence on the island. Why waste much time sailing out from the mainland each day when there was firm soil in the middle of the fishing grounds? Thus their reasoning. After due deliberation fourteen families sailed out to the island and decided to call it home.

That was more than 200 years ago. Today there are 1,700 inhabitants on the island, almost all of whom are descended from the original fourteen families. In the two centuries intervening not more than a dozen strangers have been permitted to settle on the island permanently. Intermarriage on such a scale, it may be noted, has produced a sturdy, healthy progeny with an average mentality.

Tangier Island today offers the visitor a glimpse of life as it was lived in the America of the eighteenth century. Primitive customs prevail. The community is completely isolated. There are no telephones, telegraphs, automobiles—not even horses or carts. No movies, no saloons, no modern lighting—all this within 100 miles air distance from the nation's capital and the bustling city of Baltimore!

Once a day a mail boat puts out from Crisfield, Md., the nearest mainland port, and brings the island within touch of the outside world. The boat returns the next day. Through this tenuous thread of communication a manifestation of civilization has permeated old Tangier. The women of the island, inspired by the bright lures of mail order house catalogs, have discarded their picturesque costumes and wear comparatively modern frocks. They cling, however, to the huge sunbonnets which, because of the glare of the sun, are essential to comfort on the treeless island.

Until last fall the island was barred to tourists. Then the Virginia Autumn travelogue persuaded the community leaders to allow Tangier to be included on its itinerary schedule. The islanders silently regarded one day last September the first party of sightseers ever allowed to set foot on shore, to exclaim at the narrow streets only eight feet wide, the above-ground cemeteries, the fishing fleet of "cunners" lying in the harbor.

Only in the fall, however, is this foreign invasion to be permitted. The traveler who wishes to get the true flavor of the place would do well to voyage to Tangier at another season. He will be rewarded—

although he must endure surly stares at first. If he obeys the rules he finally will be welcomed. The rules are simple but may be somewhat difficult of observance for the outsider. Before entering upon a further description of life on Tangier Island as it is lived today the reader is

ture Fort McHenry, in Baltimore harbor, Lord Packenham stopped again at the island, congratulated the Rev. Mr. Thomas upon his ability as a prophet, and offered to take him back to England. The minister sternly refused the tempting invitation. The British invaders are also



A view from the air of the 200-year-old settlement on Tangier Island. The population of the island is 1,700.

invited to a summary of the history of this unusual spot.

After its settlement, and because of the deep religious fervor of its inhabitants, the island became noted as a gathering place for the godly. About the time of the revolution pilgrims from as distant places as New York and South Carolina assembled to attend camp meetings on the beach.

The patron saint of the island was Josiah Thomas, a Methodist evangelist. He was known as the "rowboat preacher." He was holding one of these beach meetings when the British fleet in 1812 sailed up the bay on its way to an attack on Washington and Baltimore. The invaders stopped to press the male inhabitants into service.

With the Rev. Mr. Thomas blistering them with predictions of hellstone and hell fire, the Britons began seizing the boats of the islanders. These latter, rather than permit the British to use the craft in landing operations, scuttled their boats under the very bows of the English frigates lying in the harbor. Somewhat irate at this churlish behavior, Lord Packenham, the British commander, landed and attended the Rev. Mr. Thomas' meeting, probably intent upon some earnest heckling. Him the Rev. Mr. Thomas addressed in no uncertain terms, predicting that the British attack would fail.

Legend has it that upon his return from his futile attempt to cap-

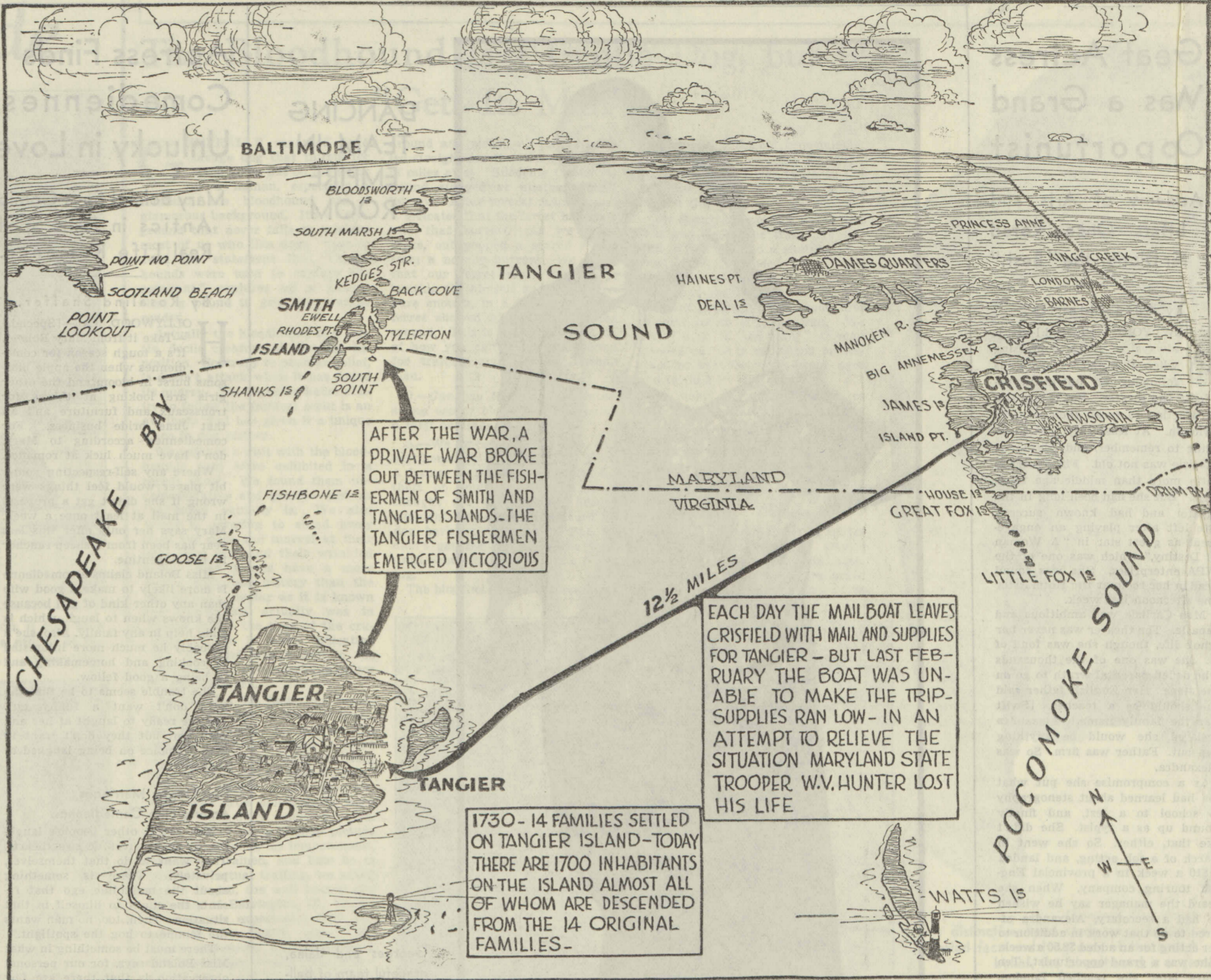
blamed for the lack of trees on the island. According to tradition they cut down all the trees in order to build a fort, which later was abandoned.

The Tangier Islanders lived placidly for more than a hundred years thereafter without attracting the attention of the outside world. The entrance of the United States into the World war in 1917 resulted in the drafting of some forty puzzled inhabitants for a conflict of which they had heard only vaguely. Only four of the forty failed to return.

Then in 1920 there occurred an incident which put Tangier into the public prints and the islanders became aware of a sinister menace to their peace—the newspaper.

One of the rules by which the inhabitants lived then—and still do—is that everyone goes to church on Sunday. There is only one church, Methodist Episcopal. For 200 years the regulation existed that those not attending services should remain indoors and not venture outside under pain of a severe penalty. That penalty was not specified, because there had never been an infraction of the rule. It remained for Chief Constable C. C. Connorton to determine that the penalty was death.

On a bright spring day in 1920 Roland Parks, 18 years old, son of one of the leading families of the



Although lying in Chesapeake bay, within easy distance of the mainland, Tangier Island has remained for years an almost completely cut off community. The daily mail boat and the infrequent visitor are its only links to the outside world.

island, decided that he would not go to church. Moreover, he sat on the front porch of his home across from the church, smoked cigars, and made disturbing noises when the hymn-singing started.

Constable Connorton, appalled at the criminal behavior of the youth, reprimanded him and received derisive answers. The constable thereupon drew his gun and shot young Parks dead.

Now, this episode was strictly a family affair in the opinion of the islanders. The constable had only done his duty, according to general opinion (not shared by the Parks family). But news of the incident leaked out to the mainland, and soon a strange assortment of newspaper men called themselves newspaper men descended upon the island.

The stories sent out by these invaders carried accounts of some of the old-time customs prevalent on Tangier. The mail boat brought back some of the newspapers carrying these dispatches. Sentiment was such that wisdom prompted the immediate departure of all the correspondents. Constable Connorton had been observed in the act of oiling up his trusty revolver.

No inquest was held into the death of young Parks. No investigation was demanded by his family. But in 1925, a long five years after (the islanders are a patient lot), the constable was enjoying a meal of steamed clams beside an open window. A bullet through the window ended his career. No inquest, no inquiry followed this episode to the Parks killing.

One more story rounds out this illustration of Tangier character. In 1926 a war broke out between the fishermen of the island and Smith's Island, some miles distant, concerning the boundaries of the fishing grounds. Some firing of rifles between the two groups was indulged in on the waters of the bay, and, according to reliable report, the Tangier Islanders ordered a small canon, capable of firing one-pound shells, from a munitions factory. Reports of this serious view of the affair filtered into the enemy camp and the war was over. Tangier fishermen had had it all their own way since then.

Let these stories give the impression that the islanders are a warlike race, let it be noted that this correspondent, after some hours among them, found them to be a simple, homely folk, cordial after their first suspicions of a stranger had been removed. They are bellicose only in the defense of the rights they believe to be theirs and in the maintenance of the order they have set up for the peaceful conduct of the community.

There are now a mayor and council on the island, due to the influence of one Harry L. Hopkins, celebrated as the chief spender of the present national administration. Without a regular city administration, Mr. Hopkins ruled, the island could not legally benefit from a share in the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars by the Works Progress administration.

Even Tangier had heard that a wonderful new order had come to the United States and that any com-

munity could obtain its split of the gigantic fund by registering a request through the duly constituted authorities. Quickly Tangier selected a mayor and a council. A new word, "boondoggling," was added to the quaint dialect of the residents.

But the minister of the church remains the true ruler of the island. The Rev. Harry N. Bailey, pastor of the Methodist Episcopal church, is a little irritated at the stories about the eccentricities of his flock. Said Mr. Bailey to this interviewer: "That Parks shooting was accidental. The circumstances surrounding it were exaggerated. But as a result of the publicity given to that affair there have arisen distorted opinions of our community."

According to Mr. Bailey's version of the shooting, the youth Parks had gathered on the porch opposite the church a group of hoodlums who had created a disturbance which annoyed the worshippers inside. Constable Connorton, in the act of waving his revolver to quell these ruffians, had accidentally discharged the weapon and slain Parks.

"There also has been some talk about our services being on the hysterical order," said Mr. Bailey with some indignation. We conduct a dignified and conservative worship. We have a congregation of 800."

As further proof of his flock's conservatism Mr. Bailey noted that Tangier contains one of the largest chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Virginia (the island is in Virginia waters, although only twelve miles from the Maryland shore), and that "there are a great number of Masons, American Mechanics, and Red Men" among the inhabitants.

The antagonism against outsiders, especially newspaper men, was created by the "unfair" stories carried about the Parks shooting. Mr. Bailey said:

"Cameramen, of course, are barred from taking pictures without a permit," he remarked. "They seem to want to make photographs only of the caskets of the dead above ground. That is not unusual in this district. In low-lying ground, where the water may seep in, it is only logical not to bury the dead."

Despite Mr. Bailey's assertion, the sight of a row of white stone caskets set on stilts above the earth probably will continue to stir the curiosity of strangers. The fact that these visible burying grounds are in the front yards of homes will possibly not detract from the interest they attract.

The visitor peers at the grave-stones over white picket fences which surround every yard. The names on the markers are, of course, mostly those of the fourteen families who settled on the island 200 years ago. Families named Parks, Crockett, Pruitt, Shores, and Thomas make up the majority of the inhabitants.

The streets, as has been said, are about eight feet wide. They are unpaved, and on the particular spring day when this correspondent was present the pedestrians picked their way between wide and deep puddles of muddy water. The New

Deal is bringing paving to the island, according to report.

One evidence of modern civilization was observed, a jail, a one-cell affair which it was learned was built by the new constable who replaced the slain Connorton. It has yet to house a culprit after ten years.

One probable reason for the peace on the island is the hatred of the inhabitants for alcohol in any form. A species of oink "pop" is their favorite vice. It is whispered that some of the islanders relax occasionally on a week-end visit to Crisfield, but never has one of these miscreants been known to defy tradition and take back a nip for the next morning's hang-over. Lying on a couch would be the fate of any backslider found with intoxicants in his possession.

Life seems to be very simple and pleasant for the islanders. Their homes are small but cozy, kept neatly inside and out. There is no poverty. The wealth of the oyster and crab beds all around the island supplies the inhabitants with their few needs. They seem satisfied with their isolation.

Once in a decade this isolation which they prize is a source of danger to those on Tangier Island. Early last February a great ice pack piled up in Chesapeake bay and cut off the settlement from the mainland for two weeks. The mail boat was unable to penetrate the ice jam, and supplies ran low. Maryland State Trooper W. V. Hunter perished when an expedition sought to make its way across the ice with provisions.

A blimp from Washington and a plane finally flew over the island despite snow and sleet, and dropped packages of food. The incident caused a great stir, and many were the stories of "starving inhabitants." Some of the excitement died down when the islanders members of a "rescue crew" showed them out and then served them a roast duck dinner. It was Tangier's way of pointing out quietly that it was able to take care of itself, although proper gratitude was expressed for the interest taken by the outside world in the icebound community.

Another week of its prized isolation, however, would have caused real suffering to the islanders, according to the Rev. Mr. Bailey.

"We ought to have telephone facilities and an airport," the minister declared.

Whether his flock would agree with him in that belief remains a question yet to be answered.

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## Favorite Poems

"LOCH LOMOND" is one of the many songs which came into being during the activities of the Jacobites in Scotland, England, and on the continent. It is presumed to be the song of an exile returning to his native Scotland, but who this man may have been is unknown. "Loch Lomond" has been familiar to many generations throughout the English-speaking world.

### LOCH LOMOND

By yon bonnie banks and yon bonnie braes,  
Where the sun shines bright on Loch Lomond;  
O, we two ha'e passed sae many blithesome days  
On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.

O! ye'll take the high road and I'll take the low road,  
And I'll be in Scotland afore ye;  
But sad is my heart until we meet again  
On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.

I mind where we parted in yon shady glen  
On the steep, steep side of Ben Lomond;  
Where in purple hue the highland hills we view  
And the morn shines out from the gloaming.

O! ye'll take the high road and I'll take the low road,  
And I'll be in Scotland afore ye;  
But sad is my heart until we meet again  
On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.

The wee birdies sing and the wild flowers spring,  
And in sunshine the waters are sleeping,  
But the broken heart it seeks no second spring,  
And the world knows not how we're greeting.

O! ye'll take the high road and I'll take the low road,  
And I'll be in Scotland afore ye;  
But O, my true love I'll never meet again  
On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond.

The Tribune suggests "Favorite Poems" be saved for your scrapbook. Next Sunday—"Derne," by John Greenleaf Whittier.