

Annapolis: History, Charm & Naval Tradition

By Dan Schlossberg
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George Washington slept there. So did Jimmy Carter and Alex Haley.

Annapolis has many claims to fame. Residents relish their town's history, hospitality, and vitality- and enjoy proximity to Washington, Baltimore, and quaint St. Michaels, across the bay on Maryland's eastern shore [the Lady Sarah, a 130-passenger motorized vessel, makes the two-hour crossing twice a week].



An old seaport that became a sailing center, Annapolis has avoided the pitfalls of unchecked urban progress. Founded by a group of Virginia Puritans, it was first called Anne Arundel Town, after Annarundell, wife of Lord Baltimore II, and laid out on a 100-acre tract across the Severn River from the original Puritan settlement of Providence.

The original 1694 town plan called for two circles with radiating streets, creating a compact historical district sandwiched into an area that embraces one-third of a square mile. The entire town is a national historic landmark, steeped in history, tradition, and love of things nautical. Its blend of old houses, new sailboats, and bustling harbor pleases visitors with cameras.

It was in Annapolis, the first peacetime capital of the United States, that the Congress of 1783-84 ratified the Treaty of Paris, officially ending the Revolutionary War, and accepted the resignation of George Washington as commander-in-chief of the Continental army.

Washington also had time for play: in a single night of gaming, he lost 13 pounds, more than the average farmer's annual income at the time.

Numerous structures Washington knew are still standing, including the King of France Tavern in the basement of the Maryland Inn and the adjacent Treaty of Paris restaurant. Annapolis also has three other inns with 200-year-old roots.

In Washington's day, most inns (then called ordinaries) slept five to a bed legally. One of the better places, which still survives, slept "only" three per bed. Also surviving the centuries are the homes of all four Maryland signers of the Declaration of Independence. One of them, the William Paca House, has a picturesque pleasure garden that includes honey-producing bees [the garden's first bottled honey was sold this summer].



Time has been kind to the town, described by some as a museum without walls. Its concentration of 18th century architecture the nation's highest, with most located a short distance from a waterfront that has also survived the centuries. Colored plaques posted near doors indicate the various styles of architecture.

The gray dome of the Maryland State House, dominating a grassy hill overlooking the town, is the largest wooden structure of its type. The oldest state capitol in continuous use, it opened in 1779 after seven years of construction.

By then, Thomas Jefferson had already declared the brick sidewalks of Annapolis "the best in the Colonies" and St. John's College had been open 12 years.

Francis Scott Key, author of *The Star-Spangled Banner*, was a student at St. John's, which later served as a Civil War military hospital and prison camp. The college has since resumed its original mission as a center of learning focused on "the great books."

Reading and writing are as routine in Annapolis as political activity and intellectual gatherings; more than 900 colleges, universities, and trade schools lie within a 30-mile radius, giving the region the nation's highest percentage of college graduates. Many wore Navy uniforms.

The U.S. Naval Academy, the most famous institution in Annapolis, has come a long way since the school was founded on a 10-acre Severn River site in 1845. The original roster included seven faculty and 50 midshipmen—a far cry from the 600 instructors and 4,000 students who share today's 338-acre campus.

The most distinctive building on campus is the green-domed Chapel, a landmark since its erection in 1905. It contains the crypt of Revolutionary War naval hero John Paul Jones, who returned a surrender demand with the cry "I have not yet begun to fight."

A walking tour passes pictures of famous graduates, including President Carter, while the visitors center features 40 exhibits plus the 12-minute film "To Lead and To Serve." Images, artifacts, and text depict academy history.

That history is interwoven with the town's maritime traditions.



Annapolis sits on a peninsula, with water on three sides. It shares the 8700-mile Chesapeake Bay shoreline, more than the Atlantic and Pacific coasts combined.

Before the industrial revolution made Baltimore the port city of choice, merchant ships of every description- including the slave ship that brought Kunte Kinte of *Roots*- docked at Annapolis. That wasn't always easy, since Captain Kidd, Blackbeard, and other pirates preyed on Chesapeake Bay shipping.

Bronze statues at the foot of Dock Street depict *Roots* author Alex Haley reading about that heritage to curious youngsters.

Well into the 20th century, Annapolis continued to attract passenger-carrying paddlewheel steamboats, plus fleets of fishing trawlers, crabbers, and skipjacks (the last surviving sailing ships used to harvest oysters).



With 17 miles of shoreline and water at the end of most of streets, Annapolis still appeals to recreational boaters who fish, sail, cruise, race, waterski, or go "gunkholing" (exploring the bay's small caves). Its working waterfront, protected by special zoning codes, includes the building where PT boats for World War 2 were made. It is now occupied by the Chart House restaurant. Annapolis shipbuilders were also responsible for the one-time presidential yacht Sequoia.

The boating legacy is everywhere. There are even "boat & breakfast" accommodations aboard the *Woodwind*, a 74-foot sailing schooner, on weekends. Sightseeing, sunset, moonlight, and nature cruises depart from Annapolis docks and preparations are underway for a major 'round-the-world yacht race in 1998. Because Annapolis is basically a small town, getting around is easiest on foot, on the water, or via escorted tour. In addition to a wide variety of narrated harbor cruises, tours cover historic homes and gardens, government buildings, ghosts, pirates, general sightseeing, and local African-American history.

Discover Annapolis Tours runs narrated trolley tours, though photo ops are easier for those who choose to tour by boat or on foot. Guides in colonial costume conduct two-hour walking tours that include both the city and the Naval Academy, while tours of the academy originate at its visitors center.



Bistros, boutiques, and specialty shops- many with nautical or Chesapeake Bay themes- line Main Street and the dock area. There are many spots to sit, sip clam chowder, and watch the boats slip in and out of the narrow harbor. People-watching is practically a national pastime in Annapolis- especially from the balconies of the Marriott Annapolis Waterfront, the only hotel perched right on the water.

There always seems to be something happening in or around the bay. There's a wine festival in July, a seafood festival the weekend after Labor Day, and a Kunte Kinte Heritage festival the last

weekend of September. A month later, at the end of October, Annapolis marks Chesapeake Appreciation Days, a festival featuring Maryland seafood, arts and crafts, live music, educational displays, and skipjack races. The festival, honoring working watermen, is held at Sandy Point State Park.

From the brick sidewalks to the cobblestone streets and clapboard row houses, every inch of Annapolis resonates with history. A prime example is Reynolds Tavern, a four-level structure that stands at Church Circle in the heart of town. An Annapolis landmark since 1747, it is still in active use, as a combination tea room, restaurant, pub, and inn. Most of the first-floor furnishings are original.

History even lives at the Loews Annapolis Hotel, where the Powerhouse ballroom was once the energy source for local streetcars.

Before streetcars, land transportation was provided by horse—a heritage not forgotten in this history-conscious community. Annapolis Carriage runs half-hour, horse-drawn tours each evening.

Sunset views are best sampled from the Eastport side of the Severn, reachable by water taxi from Pusser's Landing, the Marriott's restaurant. Water taxis run frequently but silently, so getting one is no different than hailing one in the city. Just yell "Taxi!" Once on the water, however, there's a difference: the ride is calm, serene, and pleasant—part of the Annapolis experience. And it costs only \$2 a head.

Best bets for dinner in Eastport are Carrol's Creek Café, on Severn Avenue, and O'Leary's Seafood Restaurant, on nearby Third Street. Guests of both can walk back to the Marriott by crossing the Severn River drawbridge.

Annapolis Mayor Ellen Moyer and [then] Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich are among the local leaders who frequent a compact-but-bustling Main Street breakfast bistro called Chick & Ruth's Delly. Both have among the three-dozen celebrities with sandwiches or platters named for them on the 10-page menu (Golda Meier and George W. Bush are listed too). Owner Ted Levitt

leads customers in the Pledge of Allegiance each morning and, when time permits, performs tableside magic tricks with coins and dollar bills.

Levitt also operates the 10-room Scotlaur Inn, a 1900-flavored B&B that is one of nearly three-dozen in town. Although Greater Annapolis has more than 2,000 hotel rooms, space is tight during when weekends feature festivals, Navy football games, or sailing competitions. In 2006, the area will host its second Volvo Ocean Race.

Annapolis is located 33 miles east of Washington, 24 miles south of Baltimore, and 18 miles southeast of Baltimore-Washington International Airport (BWI), which is part of Anne Arundel County. Public transportation is available to both cities.

To reach Annapolis by automobile from New York or Philadelphia, follow I-95 south to I-895 (Harbor Tunnel). Then take U.S. 97 south to U.S. 50 East, getting off at Exit 24 (Rowe Boulevard). Annapolis is 220 miles from New York and 120 miles from Philadelphia.

http://www.sogonow.com/archives/2005/09/annapolis_histo.php accessed March 2, 2009

Another kind of overview:

If you have time, you may wish to visit **HistoryQuest** at the St. Clair Wright Center at 99 Main Street, Annapolis. In this small, three story brick building, you can see exhibits that also provide you with an overview of Annapolis history.