



John Savage

Surveyor

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Savage is a well-known name in Western Maryland, and many geographic and historical sites are associated with it. Sometimes residents assume the term is derived from Native Americans who lived in the area centuries before European settlers arrived, and advertisers often use the word in association with an Indian logo. Local origins of the word, however, are not associated with Native American experiences but are directly linked to 18th Century surveyor John Savage, who trekked across the region to settle a boundary dispute for his employer.

Lord Fairfax, sixth Lord of Fairfax of Cameron, inherited substantial tracts of land in Virginia that bordered the Potomac River and Maryland. His property boundaries were the subject of a dispute so a proper survey of the land was ordered from 1736-1737. John Savage was to determine the headwaters of the Potomac River, thereby establishing definite boundary lines and ending the estate controversy. To complete the task, Savage and his party traveled over rugged terrain, measuring tracts of land and connecting boundaries to the Potomac River.

Severe weather and depleted supplies caused the survey party to be in dire straits during their first winter of the mission. When circumstances became desperate, Savage offered to be the provisions. His heroic offer was never acted upon as supplies were replenished just in the nick of time. The story varies at this point as one account indicates that wild turkeys found their way into the camp while another version has the rations being supplied from conventional sources. Savage's adventures were passed down through written accounts, and it is from the surveyor's name that the river below his camp gets its name. Subsequently, nearby mountains were named from the river, and later the name of Mt. Savage was aptly applied to the village at the base of the Allegheny Mountain Range that stretches from northwestern Maryland into southwestern Pennsylvania.

John Savage successfully completed his mission including placement of the Fairfax Stone, a surveyor's marker, officially indicating the headwaters of the North Branch of the Potomac River. The original stone has been

Photos above, clockwise from top left: Savage River; Savage family (photo taken in Garrett County circa 1912); town of Mt. Savage, Maryland; Debra Savage, Realtor; farm on Savage Mountain; and miners near Mt. Savage.

lost but a replica stone is maintained on the spot that marks the southwest corner of Maryland and two West Virginia counties. The site may be visited, and it is maintained as a West Virginia State Park.

The Savage surname is also associated with other recreational and historical sites in Garrett and Allegany Counties. The Savage River Complex is 53,000 acres of forest including New Germany and Big Run Maryland State Parks. Included within the complex is Savage River Reservoir, a 360 acre lake started as a WPA project intended to control flood waters that long plagued the basin below. World War II delayed the Army Corps of Engineers' work, and it was not completed until 1952. Today, fishing is permitted on the lake and along a five mile stretch of river below the spillway that flows into the Potomac River near Bloomington, Maryland. Some sections are restricted to "trophy trout" by Maryland Department of Natural Resources. The Upper Potomac River Commission owns and operates the dam and supplies the correct amounts of water to Savage River.

The mountain hamlet of Mt. Savage is another reference to the 18th Century surveyor's name. The town is located along Jennings Run and Maryland Route 36, at the base of Big Savage Mountain. Mt. Savage has a number of historical credits to claim, including iron making blast furnaces that transformed the settlement into Allegany County's second largest population center prior to the Civil War. The blast furnaces augmented the growing regional rail industry, causing Mt. Savage to be recognized by the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia as the first location of rolled iron rail manufacturing in the United States. The "U" shaped rails were used extensively by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad as its operations rapidly expanded throughout the area. A plaque marking the rolling mill site and the other historical memorabilia of the town may be viewed at the Cardinal Mooney Museum on Old Row in Mt. Savage.

With such a long-standing historical influence, it should come as no surprise that the Savage name lives on locally in people as well as places. Debra Savage, one of Railey Realty's top agents, continues the association of the Savage name with the land once measured, mapped and catalogued by John Savage over two and a half centuries before. "I can't say we're actually related to him, although, we've never really done a full family genealogy search to find out one way or the other," admits Debra. Still, she can say her family has been in the Garrett County area for at least two generations, as residents and business owners — including, as fate would have it, a once-thriving business that sold Allis-Chalmer tractors, used to till the same soil once surveyed by a man of the same name so long ago.



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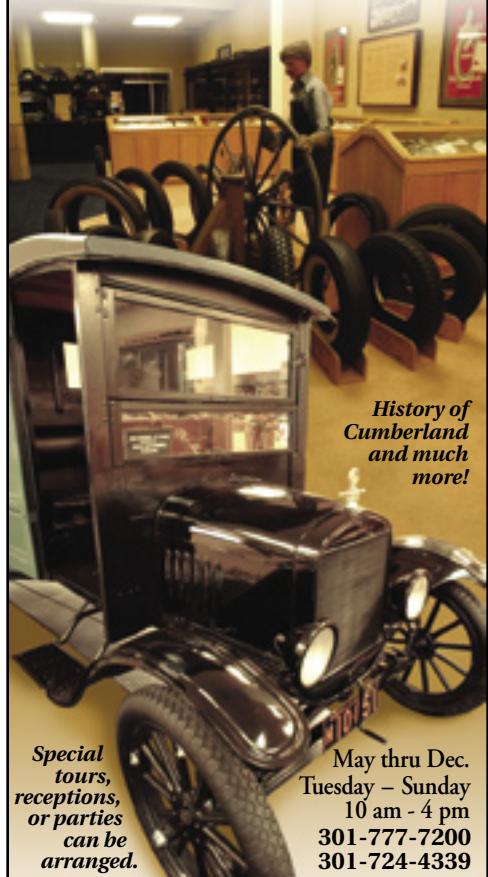
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