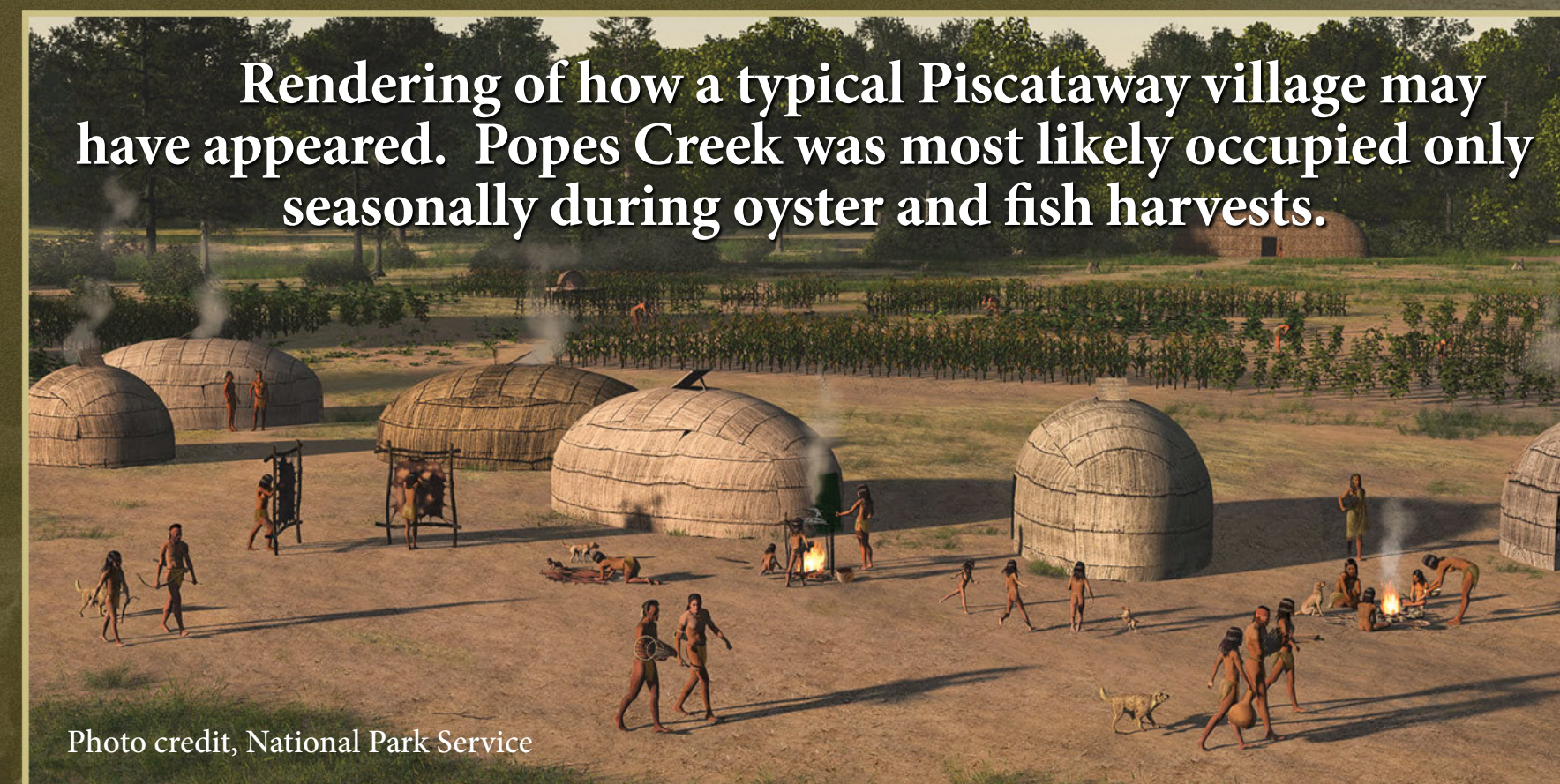


THE NATIVE AMERICANS AND OYSTER MIDDENS OF POPES CREEK



The first indigenous people of Charles County arrived more than 10,000 years ago, before melting northern glaciers flooded the ancient Susquehanna River valley giving birth to the Chesapeake Bay. When English planters began settling Charles County during the early to mid-1600s, various Algonquian-speaking groups (later collectively referred to as the Piscataway Indians) lived in permanent villages along the Potomac River and its tributaries. Living peacefully at first with the new arrivals from England, the Piscataway continued their traditional lifestyle of hunting and fishing, cultivating maize and tobacco, and gathering oysters.

Oysters once abounded in the Potomac River and were a major food source for the native peoples. Over many centuries of oyster harvesting, the discarded shells accumulated into enormous mounds known as oyster middens. One of the largest and most archeologically rich ancient oyster middens in the Potomac tidewater was found at Popes Creek. Surrounding the mouth of the creek, this expansive oyster midden extended across roughly 30-acres and was up to 20-feet deep in some locations. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, however, the oyster shells were systematically removed and burned in kilns to produce lime for use in fertilizer and other products. During the early 1900s, Popes Creek oyster shells were also used to construct the first paved roads in Charles County. Today, after many years of shell removal only remnants of this once extensive oyster midden remain.

Amidst encroachments by English planters and the arrival of hostile Iroquois and Susquehannock Indians from the north, by 1700 the Piscataway were displaced from their native lands. Many slowly migrated northward through Pennsylvania, New York and into Canada, eventually becoming lost to history. However, some of the Piscataway remained behind, and to this very day, their descendants continue to live in Southern Maryland.