

Martin's Point History

*The following is an article by Richard Cobb, Real Estate Editor,
published in "The Virginia Pilot & Ledger Star" on March 28, 1982.*

Paradoxical sets of tracks are evident in the woods of Martin's Point, N.C. In the swath of the wide imprints of earth-moving equipment treads are the dainty elliptical hoofprints of the deer that roam the dense forests of the peninsula.

Housing is coming to one of the last large undeveloped tracts in the Dare County section of the Outer Banks. This is a 335-acres strip that lies on the east side of Currituck Sound immediately north of the Wright Memorial Bridge. Martin's Point Creek (also known as Jean Guite Creek) is the eastern boundary. A motorist driving on the bridge, toward the beaches, can see the strip to his left.

The point is about 2 1/2 miles long and less than half a mile wide at maximum. But the important geographical statistic is that it has five miles of shoreline. The developers have platted 385 building lots, 225 of them on the waterfront and 160 in the interior.

While access to the point is still limited to four-wheel-drive vehicles, the developers are receptive to buyers in Part 1. That's the section closest to U.S. Highway 158. At the moment, \$35,000 will buy your choice of 100-foot-wide lots. The roads are being cut now. These will be private roads built to state standards so they could be dedicated to public use if the families who buy there, if they wished, dedicate them (and the maintenance costs) to the county or state.

When Part 2 of the development is ready, the prices will increase. This is the northern end where the creek and the sound join. The unusually large lots at the point are expected to sell for about \$100,000.

The developer is Martin Point, Inc., a corporation with 11 stockholders. Among them are principals in Sun Realty of Nags Head, a professional man from the Pittsburgh area, and an airline pilot who flies from Saudi Arabia. They bought the tract in February 1982 for

\$3.5 million from the trustees of the Gravely estate, a tobacco-wealthy family from Rocky Mount, N.C.

At the moment, Martin's Point is uninhabited. But there remains visual evidence of its past when it was a plantation farmed with slave labor, when the little shipyard near the manor house built and repaired schooners and when the entire point and adjacent lands were a rich source of timber.

About 1940, the Gravely family bought the 325-acre point with its century-plus house and converted it into a hunting preserve. At the junction of the old dirt road entrance from the highway stands a concrete pillar inscribed with the word "Catco". This is an acronym for China-American Tobacco Co., the Gravely family enterprise that later became a part of American Tobacco Co.

This one-lane, dirt road is passable all the way to the northern point, but the travel is rough in a conventional automobile. It follows the high ridge on the creek side and will be abandoned and allowed to return to the forest when the wide, new roads are built along the center of the land strip.

As near as Martin's Point is to the ocean, the topography bears little resemblance to beach land. It has a rolling, hilly contour. Where the bulldozers have uprooted some of the gigantic hardwood trees, the soil strata show some sand, some clay, some peat moss, and some rich black loam. The Point is with small freshwater ponds and some sizable lakes. Waterfowl and turtles abound here. Wild grapes in the woods attract all sorts of birds.

Martin's Point's settlement is subject to legends, some probably factual in part. Nevertheless, they have caused some treasure hunting.

Willis Gallop (1764-1848) came to the point in his own schooner sometime in his early life. It was popularly believed that the ship also bore chests of silver and gold of dubious ownership.

Willis Gallop died at 84. He and his first wife, Mary, who died at 25 in 1808, are buried in adjacent graves in woods near their home. Willis acquired a second wife, Polly, and huge land holdings, perhaps 6,000 acres that extended from Powell's Point to old Kitty

Hawk village. It certainly extended to Southern Shores (the north side) but the ocean side was considered virtually worthless.

The early settler either bought or established a plantation on Martin's Point and either he or his son, Hodges, set up a shipbuilding and repair yard there. Willis had four children.

He wrote his will in 1844 and died four years later. The will passed on the plantation and some slaves to Polly on condition that she not remarry. Among other things she inherited were some furniture and kitchen equipment, three cows and calves, one-third of the hogs, her choice of the dogs, a young mare with tack, the spinning stuff and loom, a small canoe, three hoes and a gun.

Hodges was also given land and slaves, his mother's inheritance when she died or remarried, the schooner High Priest and her materials and an iron chest. The other children were also left bequests and personal property but apparently in smaller amounts.

The plantation house still stands about half a mile from the north end of the point. An open porch now surrounds three sides, likely an addition made when the property was a hunt club.

The Martin's Point or Jean Guite Creek is quite wide here. On the shoreline and extending into the water are the remnants of a ship-launching and hauling railway. Rusting and marine-growth encrusted spikes that were used to secure heavy timbers on wooden ships are easy to find around the shoreline. There is also a collection of smooth ballast rocks around the base of some large trees there.

This is the site of a small marina the developers will build for the benefit of the property owners.

Hodges Gallop, according to local legends, had a fleet of schooners that were in trade between the east coast and the West Indies. He might have been a blockade runner during the Civil War. At least, according to old memories, when Gen. Ambrose Burnside and his federal troops landed on Roanoke Island, Hodges Gallop was captured. He was beaten to try to force him to tell the location of his treasure. They got nothing out of him.

In his 1875 will, Hodges Gallop split up the property among his heirs and directed that all of his “sea boats” be sold to pay for the schooling of his five sons.

A Lyons family that operated an iron foundry in Newark, N.J., acquired much of the property around the turn of the century and tried a lumbering enterprise. The reputed price was \$6,000. Then all but 100 acres was sold to Tunis Lumber Co., A Dr. Griggs from Poplar Branch was the next owner. Then the Gravely family acquired the point – the 335 acres – about 1940.

Paul Breaux of Sun Realty, one of the stockholders of Martin’s Point, Inc., said his associates were dedicated to preserving as much of the flora and fauna on the tract as possible. They plan to domesticate wild ducks for the freshwater lakes and ponds by first clipping their wing feathers and then feeding them handsomely, while they regain their flying ability.

Houses built-in the development must meet the standards of the architectural review committee. The minimum size will be 1,200 square feet.

A shallow strip with 1,400 feet of frontage on U.S. 158 will be turned into an office park. Breaux said that Sun Realty would have an office there and that possibly a building contractor and a stockbrokerage-investment company would locate in the park.