Chesapeake

A Novel by

James A. Michener

CHESAPEAKE

James A. Michener

Random House New York

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Michener, James Albert, 1907–
Chesapeake.

1. Eastern Shore, Md.—History—Fiction. I. Title.
PZ3.M583Ch [PS3525.I19] 813'.5'4 78–2892
ISBN 0–394–50079–2
ISBN 0–394–50202–7 lim. ed.
ISBN 0–394–50312–0 deluxe ed.

Manufactured in the United States of America

2 4 6 8 9 7 5 3

FIRST EDITION

Designed by Carole Lowenstein

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Acknowledgments

I first sailed upon the Chesapeake in 1927 and was a frequent passenger thereafter. From my earliest days on the bay I considered writing about it, but always postponed beginning until such time as I could live along its shores for some extended period. This opportunity came in 1975, when I lived near a small but historic fishing village for two years. During that time I met and worked with the many learned people whose ideas infuse this novel, and I should like here to give them the thanks they so richly earned.

The Chesapeake Bay: Walter Robinson of Swarthmore first took me boating and instilled in me his love of the area. Judge William O'Donnell of Phoenixville allowed me to crew his *Prince of Donegal* scores of times, and Larry Therien helped me to explore. Pearce Coady took me on his *Cleopatra's Barge* to parts of the bay.

The Choptank River: Lawrence McCormick and Richard Springs took me on small-boat excursions to the headwaters of the river. Edward J. Piszek arranged for helicopter explorations at low level. Judge O'Donnell sailed me to all parts of the river, as did Joseph A. Robinson.

Skipjacks: Three captains helped enormously. G.S. Pope, now retired, told me of the old days. Josef Liener instructed me as we sailed the *Rosie Parks,* and Eddie Farley took me out for long hours of oyster dredging on his *Stanley Norman.* I was also allowed to inspect various old boats as they stood on blocks.

Oysters: George Krantz of the University of Maryland's Center for Estuarine Studies shared with me his research findings, and Robert Inglis kept me informed as to his progress in growing oysters in the creek which formed his front yard. Levin Harrison told me casually of the rough old days.

Geese: Ron Vavra, twin brother of the man who provided the photographs for my book *Iberia,* introduced me to the basic research on the Canada goose, and dozens of hunters helped me understand its habits. William H. Julian, Manager of the Blackwater National Wild Life Refuge, showed me his 60,000 geese and was unfailingly helpful.

Herons and ospreys: After I had done a good deal of field work on these enchanting water birds, I had the good luck to meet up with Jan Reese, a leading expert on both species, and he gave me advanced instruction on aspects I had not contemplated.

Big guns: Dr. Harry Walsh, the principal authority, showed me his collection, talked of the old days, and helped me to understand the functioning and mystique of these one-man cannons.

Trees: Stark McLaughlin, Project Forester, State of Maryland, gave much useful advice concerning various aspects of tree growth and culture.

Choptank life: Captain Bill Benson, of the nation's oldest ferry route, provided invaluable reminiscences. Ambassador Philip Crowe was most helpful in telling of recent developments. And Alyce Stocklin, a friend of many years, was hilarious as a constant commentator. H. Robins Hollyday was generous both with his time and his store of old photographs, and Peter Black was helpful in diverse ways.

Black history: Dickson Preston generously shared with me his remarkable discoveries relating to Frederick Douglass; these lend authority to my treatment of slavery in the area. He also read the complete manuscript and made valuable suggestions on historical details. My friend Dorothy Pittman convened some of her black neighbors to talk with me, particularly James Thomas and LeRoy Nichols. Judge William B. Yates provided sober and ecumenical reflections on the days of trouble.

Although for dramatic reasons the action of this novel takes place on the northern shore of the Choptank, much of my most effective research was conducted on the south bank, for which I have a special affection, and I am deeply indebted to the experts of that

region. Bayly Orem, of a distinguished Dorchester family, met me on a dove shoot and took it upon himself to introduce me to his neighbors who might prove helpful:

Boat building: James Richardson, famous for his reconstructions of historic boats, was constantly instructive, as were his sons-in-law, Tom Howell and James D. Brighton.

Turkling: State Senator Frederick C. Malkus, the region's premier turtle trapper, took me turkling, as that sport is called.

Gigging: Richard Drescher, one of Maryland's principal athletes, took me night frogging in the marshes of south Dorchester.

Little Choptank: Dale Price allowed me to inspect his place on the Little Choptank, the site occupied by Herman Cline's slave farm prior to the Civil War.

Indians: Judge William B. Yates told me of the Choptank Indians and other matters.

Marshland: Elmer Mowbray allowed me to accompany him on explorations of his privately owned marsh. He is an expert on estuarine life, and I am indebted to him.

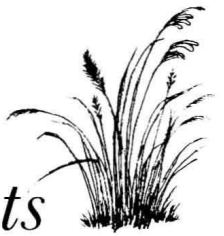
Fishing: David Orem and Jay Alban taught me about fishing and the intricacies of nature in the bay area.

Research: Everyone at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, St. Michaels, was most helpful; the director, R.J. Holt, was especially so. The library in Easton, Maryland, has a distinguished collection of research materials; its director Elizabeth Carroll saw to it that I had assistance, and Mary Starin, custodian of the Maryland Room, was indefatigable in finding books, as she is with all who work in the library. Robert H. Burgess, of the Mariners' Museum in Norfolk, helped with both his books and his counsel.

Studies: Details of early activity were checked against *Tobacco Coast. A Maritime History of the Chesapeake Bay in the Colonial Period* by Arthur Pierce Middleton. The nature of commercial life on an Eastern Shore plantation during the Revolutionary War came from various sources, the most revealing being *In Pursuit of Profit* by Edward C. Papenfuse, which deals with a group of commercial families on the western shore. The significance of the naval battle fought at the mouth of the Chesapeake in September 1781 is not sufficiently appreciated. My account is based on recent research, particularly *Decision at the Chesapeake* by Harold A. Larrabee, which deserves wide attention from those interested in this period.

But my constant assistants were the citizens of the Choptank area. Scores of them talked with me at social gatherings or during investigative meetings held during one of the coldest winters the Eastern Shore has ever experienced and one of the hottest summers. They were provocative, perceptive, amusing . . . and often hopeful that I would quit my project and go elsewhere, lest my writing awaken the rest of the world as to what a sequestered paradise they were enjoying on the Eastern Shore.

To
Mari Michener
who cared for the geese,
the herons, the ospreys and
the cardinals



Contents

Voyage One: 1583	3
The River	10
Voyage Two: 1608	44
The Island	57
Voyage Three: 1636	120
The Marsh	129
Voyage Four: 1661	164
The Cliff	185
Voyage Five: 1701	235
Rosalind's Revenge	243
Voyage Six: 1773	316
Three Patriots	325

Voyage Seven: 1811 405
The Duel 414
Voyage Eight: 1822 448
Widow's Walk 463
Voyage Nine: 1832 490
The Slave–Breaker 519
Voyage Ten: 1837 555
The Railroad 565
Voyage Eleven: 1886 640
The Watermen 649
Voyage Twelve: 1938 710
Ordeal by Fire 722
Voyage Thirteen: 1976 796
Refuge 802
Voyage Fourteen: 1978 860

CHESAPEAKE

Voyage One: 1583

FOR SOME TIME NOW THEY HAD BEEN SUSPICIOUS of him. Spies had monitored his movements, reporting to the priests, and in the tribal councils his advice against going to war with those beyond the bend had been ignored. Even more predictive, the family of the girl he had chosen to replace his dead wife had refused to accept the three lengths of roanoke he had offered as her purchase price.

Reluctantly he was coming to the conclusion that he must leave this tribe which had done everything but outlaw him publicly. As a child he had watched what happened to men declared outcasts, and he had no desire to experience what they had suffered: the isolation, the scorn, the bitter loneliness.

So now, as he fished along the great river or hunted in the meadows or merely sat in contemplation, always alone, he felt he must go. But how? And where?

The trouble had started that day when he voiced his apprehension over a raid proposed by the high chief. For more than a year now relations with tribes beyond the northern bend had been amicable, and during this interval the river had known prosperity, with more than normal trade passing north and south. But the Susquehannocks of the middle section had never in Pentaquod's life been easy in times of peace; they felt intuitively that they should be on the warpath, proving their manhood. So it was within tradition for the high chief to devise justifications for sending his warriors forth: if they triumphed, their victory would redound on him; and if they lost, he would claim that he was merely protecting the boundaries of the tribe.

Pentaquod had argued, 'Those of the northern bend have respected their promises. They have not stolen our beaver nor trespassed on our

gardens. To fight them now, with no reason, would be infamous, and our warriors would go into battle knowing that the gods could not be with them.'

His logic was rejected not only by the council of chiefs but also by the common warriors, who felt that for a Susquehannock to pass more than a year in peace would be disgraceful. If their great river had proved an excellent place to live, it must be because their tribe had always fought to protect it, and an old warrior predicted, 'Pentaquod, when the day comes that we are afraid to fight, we lose the river.'

He persisted in talking against a meaningless war, and since any who spoke for peace in the lands along this river would always be charged with treason, his opponents started the rumor that he had been contaminated by the enemy and served as their spokesman. It was recalled that his wife had died young, which increased the likelihood that the gods rejected his arguments.

To charge him with cowardice was confusing, for he was one of the tallest Susquehannocks in a generation, and they were a tribe of giants. Towering above young men his age, he looked with steady gaze from his great, broad face, darker in color than normal, sure sign of a warrior. This contradiction perplexed children who listened to the accusations against him, and they began to mimic his diffident walk as he moved alone about the edges of the village; soon they would be taunting him openly.

It was one of these children who drove him to his decision. The little boy had been aping him behind his back, causing much merriment among onlookers, when Pentaquod suddenly turned and seized him, demanding to know why he was behaving so, and the child blurted out, 'My father says the council is meeting to punish you.' And when Pentaquod looked about the village he realized that the elders were missing, and he knew that the boy was speaking truth.

It took him only a few moments to reach that decision. The council would not act hastily; it never did. There would have to be long speeches, condemning him, but if this child's father had actually used the word *punish,* a much more serious penalty than outlawing might be in store. His enemies had grown so outspoken that some might even demand death; if they convinced themselves that he was indeed a spy for the northern tribes, this would be logical.

So without returning to his wigwam, where his mother and father would be sitting in the sun, and without any attempt to recover his weapons, for this would excite those designated to watch him, he moved quietly away from the long building in which the council was meeting and toward the bank of the river. He did not, however, approach the canoes, for he knew that this would evoke alarm. Instead he kept his back to them as if watching the village, but from time to time he turned his

head to follow the flight of some bird and in this manner was able to estimate the situation on the river.

The war canoe had everything in readiness for instant departure, but it was built of oak and was far too cumbersome for one man to handle. The plan he had in mind could succeed only if he could utilize a canoe light enough for him to portage, and one such stood close at hand; it looked trim and handsome, but he had helped build it and knew its limitations: it had never won a race. Others were tempting, but he rejected them as either too slow or too heavy.

There was, however, one small, swift canoe which he had helped build for one of the hunting chiefs; it had been made of rare white pine from the north, and once during construction, when the fires burning away the insides grew too strong, he had lifted the canoe by himself and plunged it into the river, where the fires were quenched. The chief to whom it belonged had painted it yellow; its sides were stout and it had been fitted with oaken struts. It had been well pointed at the bow and had done well in races. Best of all, it was always armed for hunting and fishing, and so perched beside the river that one man, with a sturdy shove, could launch it.

'The yellow,' he muttered to himself, and left the river area and returned to the heart of the village, walking casually toward the council hall, where he observed with satisfaction that the spies assigned to guard him were withdrawing so as to watch him more stealthily. This was essential to his plan, for he could not outfight them; they were four and valiant, but he could outrun them, for he was swift.

So when he had teased them into moving as far from the river as practical, he turned suddenly and leaped with deerlike speed back toward the river. When he reached the bank he did not rush immediately to the canoe of his choice; instead he dashed along to the war canoe, taking all the paddles. Next he jumped to any lesser canoe showing paddles, and collected them too. Only then did he turn to his target.

With a cry that echoed through the village, he tossed the armful of paddles into the yellow canoe, gave its stern a mighty shove, then chased it into the muddy waters of the river, climbed aboard and started paddling vigorously downriver.

In spite of the fact that his life depended upon the alacrity of his escape, he could not refrain from looking back at his village. There were the wigwams built low to the ground; there was the home in which his parents would just now be hearing the news of his wild action; and there was the long wigwam from which the high chiefs were already running to man the war canoe in which they must overtake the criminal. He could not take his eyes off the old men as they came to the river and saw that they were powerless to pursue him. His last view of his community showed a village in uproar, with stately chiefs running back and forth