
Fall 2022

WVU Researchers are Adding New Perspectives

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Recommended Citation

Brown, Sally; Stahlman, Joe; Brown, Bonnie M.; Toren, Beth; Sherwin, Michael; Anderson, Richard; and Zafar, Maryam Marne, "WVU Researchers are Adding New Perspectives" (2022). *Indigenous Appalachia*. 10.

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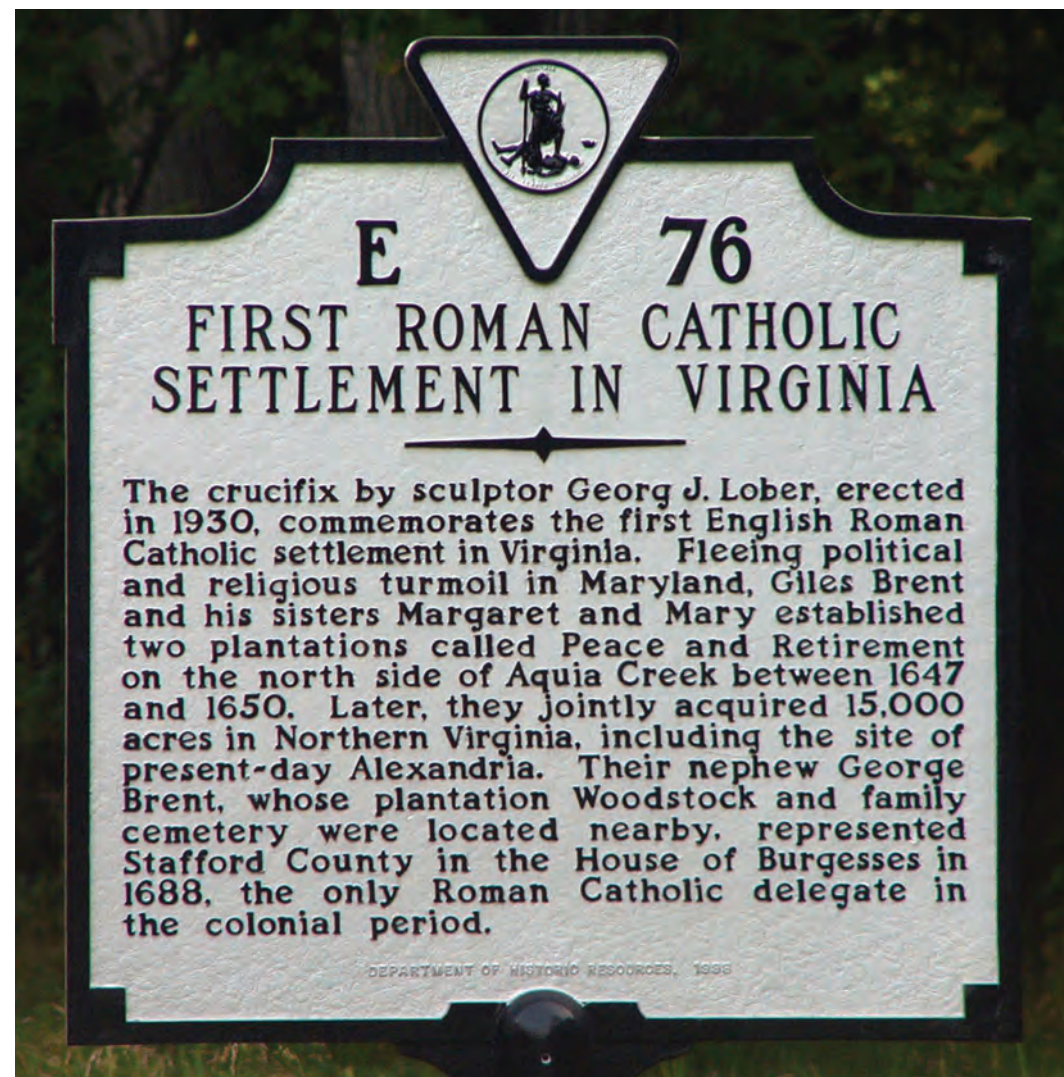
INDIGENOUS APPALACHIA



West Virginia University's Researchers are Adding New Perspectives

Dr. Kelly Watson is a WVU Service Assistant Professor of Women's and Gender Studies and a member of the Native American Studies Program Committee. She has published research on the life of Mary Kittamaquund Brent, the so-called "Pocahontas of Maryland," within the larger context of intercultural diplomacy in seventeenth-century Maryland. Watson published the article, "Mary Kittamaquund Brent, 'the Pocahontas of Maryland': Sex, Marriage and Diplomacy in the 17th century Chesapeake," *Early American Studies* (Winter 2021). In it, she argues that the marriage between Mary, an eleven-year-old girl and the daughter of the Tayac (chief) of the Piscataway Confederacy, and Giles Brent, a forty-year-old member of a wealthy English Catholic family, demonstrates that sex and reproduction were key strategies for establishing diplomatic relationships between groups and for securing power in a particularly tumultuous time. Illuminating Mary Kittamaquund Brent's position as an embodied locus of power struggles between Chesapeake tribes and Anglo-Marylanders reveals both the role of Indigenous women in diplomacy and the importance of kinship in inter-ethnic alliances. Watson's article provides a brief background of Piscataway and Maryland colonial history, contextualizes the marriage of Giles and Mary Kittamaquund Brent, analyzes the place of sex and reproduction in western shore diplomacy, and considers Mary Kittamaquund Brent's place in the history of the seventeenth-century Chesapeake.

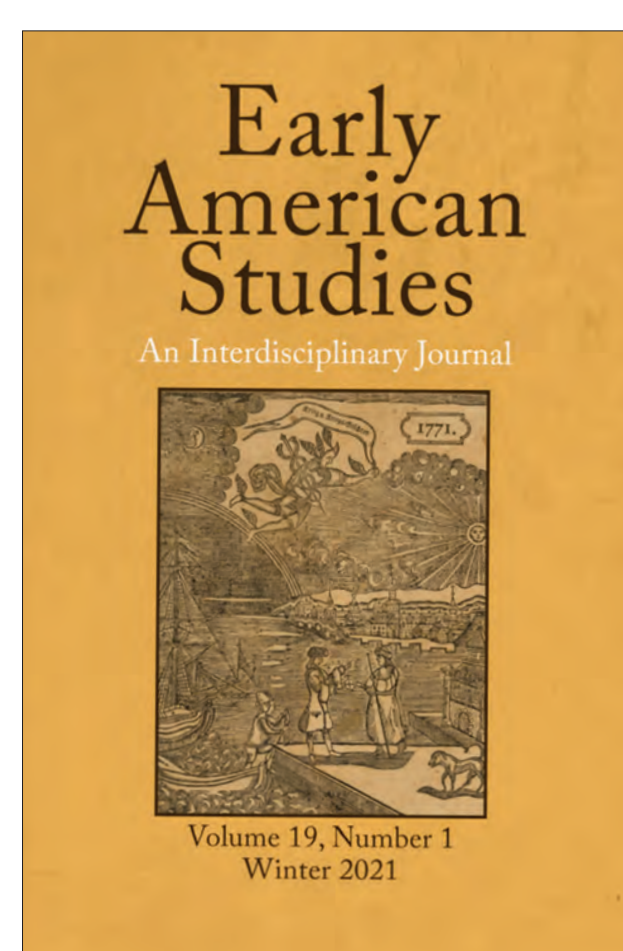
Like many other Chesapeake Native Nations in the 17th century, the members of the Piscataway Confederacy found themselves in an increasingly hostile environment. Their communities faced threats from English settlers and other Native Nations who struggled for supremacy in the region. In the face of an unwelcoming land in the east, most members of the Piscataway confederacy fled into Appalachia in the late 17th/early 18th centuries. They hoped to find refuge among the dense forests and mountains. Today Piscataway Confederacy descendants are organized into two tribal groups: The Piscataway Conoy Tribe and the Piscataway Indian Nation. Both groups obtained state-level tribal recognition in Maryland in 2012.



COMMENT FROM PROF. WATSON:
"The historical marker is fascinating because almost everything it says is wrong!"



At left:
Book Cover of *Early American Studies*.
Ending Commentary paragraph from
Prof. Watson's publication,
Mary Kittamaquund Brent,
"The Pocahontas of Maryland"



Despite the many unknowns, though, Mary Kittamaquund has much to teach us. Her story offers glimpses into early Maryland diplomacy with Native neighbors, the difficult-to-see workings of some of those Native societies, and the gendered, sexual, and reproductive politics at play in all of it. Perhaps most urgently, however, this exploration of Mary's life illustrates that lives are not made more or less meaningful through their archival presence or lack thereof; they are simply made more visible, which in turn influences the production of history in predictable and unfortunate ways. The invisibility of Mary—and of most Indigenous North American women—in the archives does not lessen them, but failing to at least attempt to recover their lives and experiences when we can lessens the histories we all share.⁹⁹

CLICK here to read more about
Prof. Kelly Watson's work:

