Chapter VII   Conclusions

When looking at traditional landscapes on the Eastern Shore, one must look closely at the relationships between people and the land, and people and natural resources. How do those who lived there and continue to live there interact with the land and natural systems? What are the characteristics of these landscapes that are specific to the people and the place? One can drive throughout Northampton and Accomack counties on the Eastern Shore of Virginia and see relics of the past at every turn: old farmhouses in the midst of large agricultural fields, smaller houses decaying in the field's woodland edges, narrow roads paved with crushed shells, and stately loblolly pines edging the agricultural lands. These are but a few characteristics of very typical landscapes found on the Eastern Shore, of which Woodlands Farm and Thomas's Wharf are examples.

Characteristics, or features, of a landscape are specific to the place and the people who settled that place. The tip of the peninsula that comprises the Eastern Shore of Virginia is surrounded on three sides by water: the Chesapeake Bay to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. Water greatly influences the way people live and work. Since overland travel was infrequent because of the ease of water transportation, the Eastern Shore had a rural and dispersed population. Dense communities formed along the railroad line in the late nineteenth century, radically changing the way local farmers marketed, sold, and transported their goods. Focus eventually shifted inward, from the water to the center of the peninsula. With this change came significant change in the landscape. Landscapes near and of the water, once very numerous, were abandoned as associated activities such as commercial fishing and shipping began to disappear. Thomas's Wharf is a good example of what remains of these traditional landscapes on the Eastern Shore.

One way to read the landscape of Thomas's Wharf is to look at the physical features that remain: fencerows, building ruins, introduced vegetation, drainage ditches, and other physical structures. The physical features indicate a small twentieth century farm and commercial fishery. But there is much more to Thomas's Wharf. The history of activity at the wharf is extensive and broad along a range of historic periods. Thomas's Wharf was the site of a Native American settlement, a traditional commercial fishery,

shipping port, and farm. Location is the physical characteristic linking different periods of history together; a deep port along the Machipongo River. Easy accessibility encouraged and supported settlement and use. History is deposited in layers at Thomas's Wharf, from prehistoric to historic activities. The wharf's significance is derived from the fact that fragments of these many periods and histories can be read on the landscape; a palimpsest.

This thesis considers Thomas's Wharf a complete landscape from prehistory to modern times. The U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service evaluates a landscape much as one would evaluate a historic building, defining it as a type or from a specific time period. Thomas's Wharf is significant according to the National Register criteria. Criterion (C) [possession of distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinctions;] and (D) [have yielded, or likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history,] can be applied to Thomas's Wharf. But the question raised by evaluation of the cultural landscape assessment of Thomas's Wharf is: Does National Register significance really begin to address the landscape as a palimpsest, a record of past people and activities that are significant to the local area? The position taken in this thesis is that National Register significance does not address a landscape, such as Thomas's Wharf, as a property that is part of the continuum of history. Rather the National Register limits the study of landscapes and does not acknowledge a site's broader continuum of significance.

This thesis is an attempt to start a chain of events; to begin a project of rigorous management and preservation of Thomas's Wharf and Woodlands Farm. Future work and research are necessary to change and grow with these landscapes. Much information from these properties will be gleaned from archaeological work. There are many questions left unanswered such as: what was the relationship between the wharf and the farm?; how involved was the wharf and the individuals who owned it in marketing and selling goods along the east coast?; how did the farmers along Machipongo River interact; were they separate from those on the bayside of the Shore?; there is a visual connection with Hog Island from Thomas's Wharf, was there a physical connection as well? This thesis shows

the need for identifying landscapes that are records of change and evolution, palimpsests of a people, culture, and place. Places rich in history and activity are a rarity and warrant preservation.