



The Forgotten Politics - No Breaks for the Eastern Shore, by Delegate Addie Eckardt, 4 June 2003

Delegate Addie Eckardt, representing District 37B in the Maryland House of Delegates for almost 15 years, presents a portrait of the rise and fall of Eastern Shore leadership and influence in Annapolis. Some excerpts from her talk follow.

When Maryland Delegate Addie Eckardt (R-37) ran in her first election almost 15 years ago, Dorchester's famous son Sen. Frederick C, Malkus Jr. was closing out a long and distinguished career as a state legislator. Sen. Malkus was first elected in 1947 as a state delegate. He concluded his public service as president of the senate from 1975 to 1994.

A whole series of Eastern Shore politicians once dominated the circles of power in state government. Thomas Hunter Lowe, from Talbot, was Speaker of the House from 1969-1973. R. Clayton Mitchell (D-36), representing Caroline, Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's and Talbot counties, was speaker of the house from 1987-1993. Gov. Harry R. Hughes, of Caroline, led the state from 1979-1987. But Maryland politics changed and power shifted to the Western Shore.

In her talk entitled "Forgotten Politics - No Breaks for the Eastern Shore," Delagate Eckardt presents a portrait of the rise and fall of Eastern Shore leadership and influence in Annapolis. It is laced with her experience as an elected Republican official in a state, and county in 1994, dominated by Democrats.

She learned about packing houses, the fishing and canning industries, and Dorchester's over dependence on light manufacturing. This ultimately led to the decline of the local economy, she said, as factories across the U.S. were closing and businesses were moving to cheaper overseas markets.

The shift of political power to the Western Shore began in 1972, said Mrs. Eckardt, with reapportionment of voting districts. Elected officials in Anne Arundel and Prince George's counties, along with Baltimore County and City said they had no voice in Annapolis. They represented 55 percent of the people, but did not have enough votes in the legislature to pass their programs," said Mrs. Eckardt. The rural counties of the Eastern Shore, Western and Southern Maryland, plus Baltimore City dominated the legislature. Now Baltimore, Prince George's, Montgomery and Anne Arundel counties have all the votes, said Mrs. Eckardt. An "anti-rural" sentiment still exists today in the senate, she said.

Officials from rural counties have to work smarter and have good relationships with committee members in bigger counties. "Little dogs can drive you crazy if they never shut up. That's the way we'll get things done," she said.