

HIGHLAND, MD 250 YEARS OF COMMUNITY AND COMMERCE AT THE CROSSROADS

In the Beginning

Although Maryland was founded at St. Mary's in 1634, settlement did not reach the Highland area until 65 years later. Thomas Browne, the "Patuxent Ranger", was the first white man of record to come this far north along the Patuxent River. Previously the land was farmed and hunted by the Piscataway Indians whose arrow heads may still be found in the area.

In 1699 Richard Snowden, who owned much of the land to the south, asked Browne to survey to the far reaches of the Patuxent. This preceded Charles Carroll's grant "Doughoregan" of 10,000 acres which were defined as: *from the Patuxent River by a blind path to Thomas Browne's plantation to four Indian cabins and thence to some oaks*. Soon others ventured north and east along the Patuxent and the area of Highland was pretty well claimed by the middle of the 1700's.

Names of early families and their land grants still prevail: Snowden, Gaither, Dorsey, Ridgely, Worthington, Davis, "Bite the Biter", 'Hammond & Geist', "Hickory Ridge". While the new town of Columbia has used some of these names, the originals made up Highland. The plantation house built on "Hickory Ridge" circa 1760 still stands on Highland Road.

The Crossroads Begin

Highland Road was part of the route from Annapolis to Frederick. It was one of two public roads, in what is now Howard County, passable throughout the year. Of lesser importance was the road from Sandy Spring to Elk Ridge which is today Route 108. Where these roads crossed became an important transportation center. It seemed an ideal location for Richard Wells and his wife Lydia to open an Ordinary in 1759. Thus the area was referred to as "Wells' Tavern Crossroads". The record of this "business" identifies the start of the community and its 250 year history.

Wells' Tavern was famous as a rendezvous point connecting travelers with choice spirits, and "old time" political celebrations. It was probably from there that Charles Alexander Warfield, who grew up practically next door on "Bite the Biter", led his band of patriots to Annapolis in 1774 to protest the English tea tax. Here they burned the cargo vessel, "Peggy Stewart". It's a wonder the British did not burn Well's Tavern, a veritable nest of rebels.

As Baltimore began to overshadow the importance of Annapolis and travel through Wells Tavern Crossroads diminished,

business at the tavern also fell away. Eventually the property was sold at a sheriff's auction for non-payment of debts amounting to about \$100.

Changing Times At the Crossroads

Around this time other entrepreneurs came to the area. In 1842, William F Wall set up a store near where the tavern stood and became the area's first postmaster when the U. S. Postal Service was established. Subsequently the area was renamed "Wall's Crossroads". Joshua B. Disney setup a wheelwright shop. His building, circa 1850, still stands on the northeast corner of the crossroads. It was his son Charles, who when he became the second postmaster in 1878, got the name changed to "Highland". Supposedly the highest point in Howard County is west on Highland Road in the Allnutt Farms development.

Samuel Hopkins, who had acquired "Hickory Ridge," built a two-story store where **Boarman's Country Market** now stands. It was operated by Jackson & Bentley. Actually there have been four stores on that corner, the first three burned down. William Rannie owned the two in between and also built the large white house still standing behind the Boarman store. Locally it is still known as the "Rannie House". Henry Timmerman built a blacksmith shop and John Kavanaugh built a saddle and harness shop beside it on the remaining corner of the crossroads. These also served as toll booths for travelers using the Clarksville Pike (Route 108). Years later these two shops were replaced by a one of the earliest Ford dealerships and a garage. Today the **Highland Crossing** center occupies this area.. Other enterprises in the area included Disney's horse-run cider-press and Mr. Purvis' creamery. A grist mill just east of where Snell's Bridge crosses the Patuxent, was owned by Presley N. Schooley in 1851. This ultimately became one of Howard County's six parks, Schooley Mill Park on Hall Shop Road.

Culture At the Crossroads

Highland also developed culturally. A group of men, including Dr. William Hardy, Timmerman, Bentley and others formed the Highland Lyceum in 1885 and built a hall on land donated by Hopkins. A literary club was formed, and Highland was referred to as the literary center of the County. Dr. W. W. L. Cissel sponsored monthly plays at the Lyceum and dances were held there into the mid 1900's. It is rumored that Joshua Disney, who now owned the Log Cabin house across the street, tired of having people tie horses to his fence while they attended the dances. One night he dumped a concoction of the contents of his chamber pot along the fence. When ladies' long

skirts dragged swept through this, the dance was less than pleasant. His fence ceased to serve as a hitching post.

The Lyceum, later known as the Grange Hall, was a meeting place for the local farmers. The original building, reduced somewhat in size, is now home to **Highland Feed and Seed**.

Commerce At the Crossroads

The original land grants which comprised the Highland area were broken up over generations, inherited by descendants of the early families, or sold to others who migrated to the beautiful rolling farm land along the Patuxent. Tobacco, the main crop of Southern Maryland, here was replaced by wheat, due to the influence of Ellicott City mills. Lime needed to replenish the spent soil was burned in kilns, ruins of which can still be found. The area had always been one of progressive farms. In the 1950's the Allnutts built a model dairy layout which attracted visitors from all over the world.

The Hopkins family contributed greatly to the development of Highland. They formed the Highland Savings Bank in 1906, the second bank in Howard County. The original building still stands and is the location of **Smeeta's Wellness Center**. The Hopkins family held horse shows on Hickory Ridge and were instrumental in founding Laurel Race Track. The Highland baseball team (undefeated in 1909) played on their "Bluegrass" field. In 1881 Hopkins donated land for the school/church which is the present **Hopkins Methodist Church**. Hopkins also donated land on Highland Road for the Episcopal Rectory built circa 1890; this is a private residence today. The Episcopal Church, **St. Marks**, located at Hall Shop Road and Route 216 had already been erected in 1874. The Methodist congregation had begun building the **Mt. Zion Church** during the Civil War, but it was not permanently established until 1888. Consequently, you can find early members buried in St. Marks cemetery.

During the early 1900's Highland was rather placid. Changes from buggy to car, diminished the need for the blacksmith shop, and accelerated the mobility of people. Rough rutted lanes were paved. Work horses were replaced by farm machinery and became sources of pleasure. Riders could travel miles across open country until the building boom started shortly after World War II. An ever increasing stream of city-dwellers moved to the Highland area; partly the impact of Columbia, the planned city of 100,000 people within a few miles of the community. Farmland continued to sprout houses; new churches were built; home businesses flourished. The heart of Highland survived as a center of community and commerce. To paraphrase local historian Kendall Gambrill: *the people of Highland should: appreciate the deeds of those who gave Highland a name for sound enterprise and cultural institution; strive to carry on this heritage of*

orderly beneficial growth and excellence in all undertakings; always keep in mind the value of good taste over that of monetary profit; and strive to preserve its past as a monument of faith to the future.