

History of
Highland

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There is nothing altogether earth shattering about Highland. Neither is there any momentous event in its history. The fate of no army was decided by where Josh Disney emptied his chamber pot. No government fell when Mrs. Dentz sang out her hymn on A windy March morning. Yet, the events alluded to and the many Others which, added to them, make the history of Highland are Worthy of being recorded. History is the story of man. The History of Highland is a tale taken from that story.

There are two elements to this history. One is the physical Setting, and the other is the people associated with that setting. Highland is located North 39° 11', West 76° 57'. To the south Lies the Patuxent river. Highland extends several miles north- East of the Patuxent for about three miles along its length. There being no official boundaries, one is left with determining For oneself just where Highland ends and some other community begins. The land is in the gently rolling lower Piedmont.

As the most conspicuous topographical feature of the area, The Patuxent river attracted the attention of the first of our Species in the area - the Indians. The Indians gave it the name It now holds. In their tongue the name means "Small Descending Waters".¹ Although these Indians, the Piscataways, lived in Southern Maryland, it is evident that they were familiar with The length of the Patuxent valley by the name they gave to this river.

The Piscataways came into Maryland about three centuries before the founding of the colony.² They were a part of the Algonquin group of Eastern Indians. They were more advanced Than the Indians they replaced. They smoked pipes and, not Having heard of tar and nicotine and the Surgeon General's Report, they blew smoke over their bodies in the belief that it Would purify them.³ They were essentially farming people. It Was on hunting expeditions that they roamed up the rivers and lost the arrow heads which one can still find in the Highland area. The area was also visited by the warlike Susquehannocks, one of the Iroquois tribes from the north.⁴ Thus even in Indian days Howard County was a border area between the North and South.

Though the Patuxent river valley was explored and exploited soon after the founding of St. Marys in 1634, settlement did not reach the Highland area until the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1699 Thomas Browne came up the Patuxent surveying for Richard Snowden's "Snowden's Second Addition."⁵ He is the first white man of record to come

to the Highland area. His extensive travelings won him the title “Patuxent Ranger.”

In 1704 Hon. John Dorsey sent out his well supplied surveyors to take up a tract of land for the sons of his daughter Deborah D. Ridgely. Among their supplies was a good quantity of white wine and claret. When M. Dorsey saw the crooked outlines of their survey he thought the cause was the white wine and claret, and so this tract is named “White Wine and Claret.”⁶ It extends from Simpsonville to Clarksville and south almost to St. Mark’s Church.

Not long afterwards, Benjamin Gaither patented “Bite the Biter” on the Patuxent river just above “Snowden’s Second Addition.”⁷ To the north and east Henry Ridgely laid out “Hickory Ridge” and with Thomas Worthington took up “Partnership” which stretched east to Fulton.⁸ Later “Hammond and Gist” was surveyed west of “Bite the Biter”. These six tracts, which make up most of what is now Highland, had been established by 1740.

By this time the area was already being inhabited. Perhaps the old stone house on the western part of “Snowden’s Second Addition” is the oldest standing in the area. It was owned until recently by the Pindell family. It was built ca. 1720, possibly by Zephaniah Cecil of St. Mary’s County.⁹ On “Bite the Biter” the Gaithers built several cottages with immense brick chimneys and dormer windows.¹⁰ One of these still stands on Hall’s Shop Road. Around 1740 Major Thomas Gessaway built his gambrel-roofed Flemish bond brick house on his father-in-law Thomas Worthington’s portion of “Partnership”.

However none of these is a true plantation house as is the one erected by Greenbury Ridgely a half a mile west of Highland on Hickory Ridge which he has inherited from his father. There may have been an older house on this site since it is reported in 1893 that “Reuben, in digging for Mother’s herb bed, found foundation of old house, marked out as the stones now lie.”¹¹ The present house dates from about 1760. It is a fine example of Georgian architecture. The woodwork is especially well-done and well-preserved. French doors in the dining room open out into the garden with its huge English boxwood. West of the house stands the stone “Quarters” which housed the slaves.

These slaves worked the fields of tobacco which was then the major crop of all of Southern Maryland. After the tobacco was cured it was packed in hogsheads and rolled to Elk Ridge landing. In this period Elk Ridge was second only to Annapolis as a port in the Maryland colony. Biscuits for the vessels were made at a mill located on the Hawlings River above Haviland's Mill above Montgomery County as early as 1737.¹²

Though the planters had cleared much of the woods and built some fine houses, life in the area was neither easy nor too refined. An Englishman visited Maryland in the eighteenth century found life primitive. He recounts an evening at the home of a tobacco planter.

“After hearty Entertainment
Of Drink and Victuals without payment;
For Planter's Tables, you must know,
Are free for all that come and go.
While Pon and Mile, with Much well stoar'd
In Wooden Dishes grac'd the Board;
With homine and Syder-pap,
(Which scarce a hungry dog would lap)
Well stuff'd with Fat from bacon fry'd,
Or with Mollossus ducify'd.”¹³

As travel to the West picked up the Highland area became more important. What is now Maryland Route 216 and Highland Road was the major road from Annapolis, which was then the largest city of the province as well as the capital, and Frederick, the Center of the German settlements in Western Maryland. At the time of the Revolution this road and the one from Frederick to Baltimore were the only public roads in what is now Howard County which were passable throughout the year. Of lesser importance was the road from Sandy Spring to the Elk Ridge area which is today Maryland Route 108. Where these roads crossed became an important transportation center. About 1740 Well's Crossroads Tavern was built on this crossroads.¹⁴ It probably stood where the Post Office stands today. It was famous as a rendezvous of old travelers and choice spirits and was a popular place for “old time” political celebrations.¹⁵ It should be noted that Highland did not acquire its present name until the 1880's and was known throughout the colonial period as Well's Cross Roads.

Among the political gatherings at Well's Tavern were undoubtedly

many meetings of the Whig Club. This was a group of strongly anti-British men from Montgomery and upper Anne Arundel Counties.¹⁶ Major Charles Alexander Warfield, the head of the Whig Club, was born near Snell's Bridge on a portion of "Snowden's Second Addition." He was the son of Azel Warfield. It was the Whig Club which rode to Annapolis in 1774 to demand that the tea laden "Peggy Stewart" be burned rather than pay the English tax.

"So let King George take heed,

* * * *

The farmers rode down in the light of day
To the town by the Severn's side."¹⁷

With Major Warfield demanding either Mr. Anthony Stewart's neck or his ship, the ship and cargo of tea was set fire by Mr. Stewart who, we gather, placed a higher value on his neck.¹⁸

Anzel Warfield was also a staunch patriot. When Charles Carroll's father saw Anzel's son wearing his label "Liberty and Independence, or Death in the pursuit of it," he warned Mr. Warfield that it meant treason against his King. Old Anzel show back, "We acknowledge no King: the King is a traitor to us, and a period has arrived when we must either tamely submit to be slaves of struggle for Liberty and Independence. My son Charles knows what he is about. His motto is mine and soon must be the sentiment of every man in this country."¹⁹

Being such a nest of rebels it is a wonder that the British did not burn Well's Tavern. However, the British never did control Maryland in the Revolution and the tavern was left to die a slow death. As the importance of Baltimore began to overshadow the importance of Annapolis, so the importance of the Old Annapolis Road past Well's Tavern diminished. By 1852 the tavern had closed and the property, then held by Washington Gaither and Richard Wells Jr., was sold at the Court House for the non-payment of debts which amounted to \$100.²⁰

Clarksville, where James Clark built a store and Hotel in 1830, replaced Well's Tavern as a center of travel.²¹

The Revolution marked the period when agriculture shifted its emphasis from tobacco to wheat. The Cecils started building their house at "Hammond & Gist" on Mink Hollow Road in 1774. (Samuel Cecil

who was born there in 1776 changed the spelling of the name to Cissel.) Though they farmed extensive lands they never had a plantation establishment. Following the Revolution the Ridgelys sold “Hickory Ridge” to the Adams family, and the Gaithers of Bite the Biter” sold out or left their lands to the Hardings, Rawlings and disneys.

The beginning of the public also saw a religious revival with the spread of Baptist and Methodist circuit riders. About 1800 a Methodist church was built at Rattlesnake Springs. (Approximately 2 1/2 miles west of Highland on Highland Road where it intersects with Nichols Drive.) It was later referred to as a battleground for the early Methodists.²² The site was also used for numerous camp meetings and social events to which people would come from all over the country. The spring below, which was famous for its excellence and number of years it has been running, must have quenched a lot of religious fervor during these meetings. Though the church was closed after the Civil War and was used as a hay barrack, camp meetings were held nearby up to the twentieth century.

Along with religion the local people were also getting education. On Hall’s Shop Road near Route 108, a log school was erected. Later in 1852, primary school district No. 28 was divided and another school site about a mile and a half west of Highland was selected. For the sum of \$33, assessed by James Clark, Sam Nichols, William Clark, Upton Dorsey, William Walling, Nathan Childs, Joseph A. McNew, John T. Hardey, William H. Hardey, Henry Walling, and Denton Miller, a lot of 120 square perches was purchased. One corner of the lot was marked by a white oak tree named “old Ben’s Tree.”²³ How and when this tree got its name is unknown.

On the banks of the Patuxent River another enterprise was taking shape. Sometime before 1833 Joseph Bond established a grist mill on the Anne Arundel (now Howard) side of the river.

The attendance record for the fall of 1838 of an old school located west of Highland in the vicinity of Triadelphia. Among the students are several Hardys, Heines, and Gaithers.

A little below Snell’s Bridge. This mill passed first to Lewis Eyre and then to Presley N. Schooley in 1851 for \$2465.²⁴ It has been known since as Schooley’s Mill although it was later run by the Johnsons.

Meanwhile Wells’ Cross Roads and Tavern had evolved into Wall’s

X-Roads. William F. Wall came up from Anne Arundel County in 1842 to set up a store on the corner where the old tavern stood.²⁵ Seven years later Joshua B. Disney, also from Anne Arundel County, bought this corner and built his wheelwright shop just east of the store which Mr. Wall continued to run.²⁶

Farms also became more numerous until at the time of the Civil War the area under cultivation nearly equaled that of today. The increased settlement of Upper Anne Arundel County in general led to the establishment of Howard County in 1852. In 1860 the first county map was published and Wall's Cross Roads, though not named shows a considerable population.

This was about to be interrupted by the confusion of civil war. Though Maryland was a slave state she also had a well developed industry. Slavery was dying in Maryland because most of the cultivation was done on farms and not on plantations. This was especially true of Wall's Crossroads. Tobacco plantations had become wheat farms and slaves were used mostly as house servants or as a handy-man. However the decline in slavery did not mean that people were changing from Southerners into Northerners. More accurately the people were neither Southerners nor Northerners but Marylanders and very pro-States Rights too. Whether to secede or not was a hot question in Maryland, but whether or not a state had the right to secede was not questioned. So Maryland tottered on the verge of secession until Lincoln called for arms against the Southern States. That was too much for any Marylander who didn't wish to put his Revolutionary fore-father to shame. Maryland refused to send troops, and in Baltimore the first Massachusetts troops to enter the city were attacked.

“I hear the distant thunder hum,
Maryland!
The Old Line's bugle, fife, and drum,
Maryland!
She is not dead, nor deaf, nor dumb-
Huzza! She spurns the Northern scum!
She breathes! She burns! She'll come! She'll come!
Maryland! My Maryland!”²⁷

Howard County, like the rest of the state, was up in arms to defend her sovereignty and the rights of the South. The people of the Fifth District of Howard County gathered at Clarksville on April 23, 1861 to hold a great secession meeting.



At 1 o'clock p.m. an immense secession flag was raised on a pole thirty feet high, amid the cheering of the multitude. The Fifth District has just seceded from the Union. A company of cavalry was formed at this time. It consisted of 85 "able bodied farmers" and Dr. W. W. Watkins as Captain, T. S. Clark as First Lieutenant, John T. Hardey as Second Lieutenant, Martin H. Batson as Orderly Sargeant (sic) and Dr. J. Nicholls as Surgeon. Strong secession and resistance speeches were delivered by Dr. Watkins, Dr. Wm. E. Hardey, Hon. John S. Watkins, State Senator, and others.²⁸

A few days later the meeting was reported to have been one to adopt defense measures rather than to secede. However all present manifested their devotion to the rights of the South and especially the honor and fame of Marylanders.²⁹ There is little doubt that Maryland would have seceded at this time had it not been over run by Northern troops.

The state was then put under martial law and was treated as an occupied territory throughout the war. Leonard Batson who, lived west of Highland on Triadelphia Road, was arrested one night and taken to Annapolis on suspicion of harboring Southern sympathizers. His son first realized that the Union soldiers were in the area when he saw their campfires. Mr. Batson was released a few days later, but his horse got loose in Annapolis before this and returned home before him. Luckily the Yankees did not know that he himself was a Southern sympathizer.

In 1864 the area was visited by Confederate cavalry, under Bradley T. Johnson, a Marylander, on its way to Poolesville from a raid north of Baltimore. Though the main body travelled west of Wall's X-Roads from Doughoregan Manor to Triadelphia - probably over Triadelphia Road, the whole county was visited by squads of the Confederates.³⁰ Around Wall's X-Roads a majority of the people were Southern sympathizers but they weren't about to lose their horses and cattle. Upon hearing of the Confederates' advance everyone took their horses and cattle to the woods for safe keeping. When the Confederates came they couldn't find and horses but did find a slave who wasn't too good at keeping mum when faced by a band of Confederate cavalry. Never-the-less there weren't too many horses lost.

After the war Wall's X-Roads resumed its steady growth. Even during the war a Methodist congregation had formed near Hell Corner and began building a church called Mt. Zion. One can gather that with such an environment it is little wonder that the church was not permanently estab-

lished until 1888.³¹ Meanwhile the Episcopalians, so it seems, joined in the crusade and began holding meetings in a grove on the Hell Corner side of Wall's X-Roads. On this site at the south-west corner of Halls Shop Road and Rte. 216 they erected St. Marks Church in 1874. It still stands today. A Colored congregation formed at Hopkins Chapel in 1881 on land given by the Hopkins family.

In 1872 Henry Timmerman bought the corner diagonally across from Wall's store, which housed a Post Office by 1878, and built his blacksmith shop under a grove of Oak trees.³² His nearby house, now owned by the Gibson family, is one of the most attractive at the crossroads. Several years later John Kavanaugh built his saddle and harness shop beside Timmerman's blacksmith shop. Across the road in about 1890, Charles T. Disney built a new wheelwright shop to replace the one beside Wall's store which was about to fall down. This wheelwright shop is today used as an antique shop.

To fill up the fourth corner at the cross roads the Hopkins built a two story store which was run by Jackson & Bently. John W. Bently bought four acres from the Hopkins in 1886 and built his House just south of Highland. This store burned but another, painted dark green, soon replaced it. William H. Rannie bought this store in 1894 and built his house nearby.³³

But Highland wasn't just developing commercially. Some time between 1878 and 1885 the name of the post office was changed from Wall's X-Roads to Highland. Though no one knows exactly why or when the name change came, it may well have been when the post office was moved from Wall's store to the Hopkins (Jackson & Bently) store. To bring a little culture to the new Highland, James Marlow, William H. Hardey, Henry Timmerman, Edward H. Bently and Alfred formed the Highland Lyceum in 1885.³⁴ It became known as "Lyceum" and later the "Grange Hall" or simply "Highland Hall." Dr. W. W. I. Cissel sponsored monthly plays at the Lyceum, and dances were often held. It was at these dances that the young men would tie their horses to Josh Disney's fence across the road. This rather perturbed Mr. Disney who repeatedly warned them about using his fence for a hitching rail. But the younger generation being then as they are now and always have been, tended to ignore his complaints. Finally one night old Josh decided to put an end to this foolishness. He heated up the contents of his chamber pot with a good amount of water - so it has been related - and emptied this aromatic mixture on the ground in front of his fence. That

night the buggies were drawn to the fence as usual, and the girls dragged their long skirts through Mr. Disney's concoction. The dance that night wasn't a very pleasant affair, and though Josh gained no friends, he did have the satisfaction of seeing his fence left alone.³⁵

A literary club also formed in Highland at about this time to further culture. In fact J. B. Warfield in describing the Highland of 1904 refers to it as becoming the literary center of the county.

Two other enterprises in the area should here be noted. One is the Disney's horse-run cider-press which was just east of the new wheelwright shop. The other is a creamery which was established by Mr. Purvis west of Highland where Willy Warfield later lived. A little farther west of the south side of Highland Road the Episcopal Rectory had been built about 1890 - on land donated by the Hopkins.

It is quite obvious that the Hopkins family, who had moved from Anne Arundel County in the 1850's to "Hickory Ridge", which they renamed "Whitehall," was responsible for a good deal of the progress of Highland. The diary of Mrs. Samuel Hopkins reflects the Victorian attributes of admirable and devout personality. Four months after her husband died suddenly, and burdened with running a large farm operation, including opening a lime stone quarry and burning lime in the kilns, raising her family, she wrote:

"A large family and most uncertain help is my situation at present, but I am thankful to feel well and able to do a great deal myself.

* * * * *

I'll dare not note my feelings in my daily failings. My life here is so busy, thank God, that I seem to be happy. I say with a thankful heart, I love my duty. The sweet young life around me Cheers me on. Oh! Love so great, so deep, so strong. The greater the love sadder is the parting. The sadder the parting the more glorious the hope beyond.³⁶

One of her sons was instrumental in the formation of the Highland Savings Bank on April 25, 1906.³⁷ The bank was located in a corner of

Rannie's store until its own building was completed next door in 1908. Its name was changed to Highland Bank the same year. The Hopkins also held a horse show for several years. Those who didn't go in for horses could watch the Highland baseball team at its field on "The Bluegrass" across Highland Road from "Hickory Ridge - Whitehall". In 1909 this team was undefeated.

But most of the people were still farmers and farming was their main concern. The area always had been one of the progressive farms, in vast, the second silo in the United States was built in the Fifth District of Howard County in 1876.³⁸ In 1913 the Patuxent Grange was organized at Highland.³⁹ The tradition of progressive farming has continued to the present day though the Grange is now defunct. In the 1950's the Allnutts built a model dairy layout and have attracted visitors from all over the world.

Highland's growth slowed after the start of World War 1. In March 1919 Rannie's store burned down on a windy morning. It started as a chimney fire on the roof. Mr. Dantz, who was then the blacksmith, and his family lived in the second story of the store. When the fire broke out attempts were made to put it out. However the men clamoring up to the roof with their buckets of water failed to disturb Mrs. Dentz, who sat by a window singing "Brighten up the Corner That You're in." She didn't realize how bright her corner was getting until Ada Rannie came up to tell her the store was on fire and she would have to save some of her things - she could toss them out the window and someone down below could get them - and get out. So Mrs. Dantz straightaway picks up the wash bowl and pitcher and chucks them out the window. At this Ada Rannie decided they had best forget about saving things and get out in a hurry. They barely left the burning store before the roof collapsed. Soon after the fire a new store was built on the same corner and the Dantz's moved into John Kavanaugh's old saddle and harness shop which had been repaired and furnished by the community.

Throughout the period between the two World Wars life around Highland was rather placid. The Grange won itself the title of "Traveling Grange" because it took so many trips.⁴⁰ The bank changed its name to Central Bank of Howard County in 1929 and moved to Clarksville, which, according to a nineteenth century writer, had become the "Paris of the Fifth Election District." Malcolm Disney properly assessed the change from buggy to car and replaced the blacksmith shop with a "modern" garage.



Route 29 was paved and Highland moved into the age of the automobile and suburban commuter.

Following a pause for World War II an ever increasing stream of city-dwellers moved to the Highland area. Farming, weakened by the Depression, became more a struggle for survival or a rich man's hobby. In the midst of this new growth Rannie's store was set on fire in the early morning of June 14th, 1954. The next morning it was a pile of smoking debris. However with the true sense of community spirit, the people of the community got together and cleared the site the following Saturday. On May 18th, 1955 a new store opened - the fourth on the site.

At present Highland is preoccupied with the influx of urban dwellers and the impact that "Columbia", the planned city of one hundred thousand people which will be within five miles of the community.

History is supposed to teach us something from the past. If the people of Highland gather nothing else from this story they should at least realize the wisdom of orderly beneficial growth and excellence in all undertakings. They should appreciate the deeds of those who gave Highland a name for sound enterprise and cultural institution and should strive to live up to and carry on this heritage.

In the future Highland has great opportunities. But it must always keep in mind the value of good taste over that of monetary profit. And it must preserve its past as a monument of faith to the future.

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