

CHAPTER 2

BROADNECK'S HISTORY

Formed by the Magothy River on the north and the Severn River on the south, the Broadneck is one of Anne Arundel's largest peninsulas. It holds the distinction of being the site of Anne Arundel County's first European settlement in 1649. The first settlers were several hundred non-conformist Puritans from Virginia who were invited by Maryland's proprietary ruler, Cecil Calvert, second Lord Baltimore, to settle on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. Calvert's invitation, issued during the turmoil of the English Civil Wars, was an attempt to stabilize his struggling colony. The Virginia Puritans established a dispersed hamlet at the mouth of the Severn River which they called "Providence" or "Severn." It was centered on the north shore of the Severn, between Greenberry Point and Hackett's Point. During this time, the area formed by Mill and Whitehall Creeks was known as "Broadneck," a name which later was applied to the entire peninsula.

By 1650, a sufficient population base was established warranting designation as a county, which was interchangeably known as Providence and Anne Arundel in its early years. The Puritan-based Providence quickly became the population center of the colony, shifting power away from the Catholic-controlled St. Mary's City. This was fully realized in 1695 when Governor Nicholson moved the capital from St. Mary's to Ann Arundell Town, later named Annapolis. By the late 17th century, the hamlet of Providence had expanded up the Broadneck Peninsula; plantations hugged the shorelines of the Severn and Magothy Rivers and filled much of the interior land.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries the land use of the Broadneck area remained rural, supporting large plantations of tobacco and diversified crops. Annapolis served as the market center for these farms. In the late 18th century, some of the Annapolis political and social elite owned land on the north shore of the Severn. Among them, was Governor Horatio Sharpe who in 1763 purchased 814 acres where he constructed a rural retreat or country house for entertainment. This grand house, known as Whitehall, is today considered to be one of the finest examples of classical architecture in America. It is listed as a National Historic Landmark. During this same period, John Hesselius, the renowned Maryland portrait artist owned a large plantation known as Belfield, adjacent to Whitehall. Hesselius lived nearby in Annapolis at Primrose Hill. John Gibson, another prominently connected Annapolitan, built the five-part Georgian house at Sandy Point circa 1815. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The African American community of Mulberry Hills was established after the Civil War by freed slaves who had lived and worked in the area prior to the war. Many of the early founders, including Stansbury, Green, Johnson and Little, have descendants that still live in the Annapolis area today.

The waterways with numerous ferry crossings and an intricate road system on the Broadneck provided the primary means of transportation for commerce and trade, as well as personal travel, into the 19th century. The numerous steamship lines provided another important means of transporting people and commercial goods to and from Baltimore and elsewhere. Starting in the mid-19th century,

these steamers continued to provide service until after the Great Depression. While rail transportation came early to Annapolis with the construction of the Annapolis & Elkridge Railroad in 1840, the Broadneck peninsula had to wait until 1887 with the construction of the Annapolis & Baltimore Shortline Railroad, later known as the Baltimore & Annapolis Shortline, (the B & A), and in the early 20th century as the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Railroad (the W, B & A). Today this line serves as a popular hiking-biking trail, an important recreational resource, not only for the residents of Broadneck, but as a vital link in the east coast recreational trail system.

Major transportation projects of the 20th century have had the most impact on the development and character of the Broadneck peninsula. With the increased popularity of the automobile at the turn of the century, paved roads were needed to replace the oyster shell roads of the past. The B&A Boulevard (MD 648), a wandering north-south route, connecting Annapolis and Baltimore, was paved in the early 20th century. The wooden truss bridge over the Severn River, which carried the B&A Boulevard into Annapolis, was replaced with a concrete arch-span lift bridge in 1922. It was in operation until 1992 when it was replaced by the present span. In 1939, the state completed the Governor Ritchie Highway, connecting Baltimore and Annapolis. Designed as a scenic route between the two cities, it quickly became catalyst for residential and commercial development.

In 1941, the State Roads Commission purchased a privately owned ferry service, and shifted their western terminal from King George Street in Annapolis to Sandy Point. The ferry was quite convenient at the time, but increased post WWII development brought excessive traffic congestion. In 1949, under the leadership of Governor William Preston Lane, construction of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge was begun and completed in 1952, officially opening to the public for a toll of \$1.40. Using the local Log Inn Road, the state expanded this route into a multi-lane highway, known as John Hanson Highway, or Route 50. Today, the Broadneck serves as a major transportation crossroads for the region, a factor which has made it a magnet for commercial, economic and residential development.

References:

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