

Community History

The Crofton area lies in the central western region of Anne Arundel County. Flanked on the west by the Little Patuxent River, the planning area includes the historic rural communities of Rutland and Conway and the modern suburban community of Crofton. Strategically located midway between Annapolis and the Washington Beltway, Crofton dominates the character of this region. Historically, it was agricultural, producing tobacco and diversified crops. Farming was the way of life here until the 1950s when suburban development, heralded by Crofton, began to transform the area. Today, the land south of Route 450 is still rural in character, a reminder of what the region once was.



Linthicum Walks, circa 1925 (Courtesy of Anne Arundel Heritage, Inc.)

For thousands of years prior to European settlement of the county, Native Americans occupied the Chesapeake Bay Region. They found the forks of the Patuxent River a particularly rich hunting and fishing ground. The first settlers of the Crofton area adopted an agricultural lifestyle, growing tobacco as a cash crop. The Europeans arrived as landowners, tenant farmers, or indentured servants, while the Africans were primarily slaves and free blacks who owned property. With the increasing demand for tobacco, these early planters required some means by which they could transport their crops to market. Utilizing “rolling roads,” they rolled large barrels, or “hogsheads” filled with tobacco to designated tobacco ports located on the many waterways of the county. Crofton planters relied on the Little Patuxent, South and Severn Rivers as a vital link to European markets. Some of the 18th century plantations that survive include,



A mid-19th century meathouse at Linthicum Walks (Courtesy of Donna M. Ware)

Linthicum Walks (adjacent to Crofton Middle School), Rosehill (on Bell Branch Road), Hall's Grove, Middle Plantation (both on Rt. 424), and Whites Hall (the birthplace of Johns Hopkins, on Johns Hopkins Road).

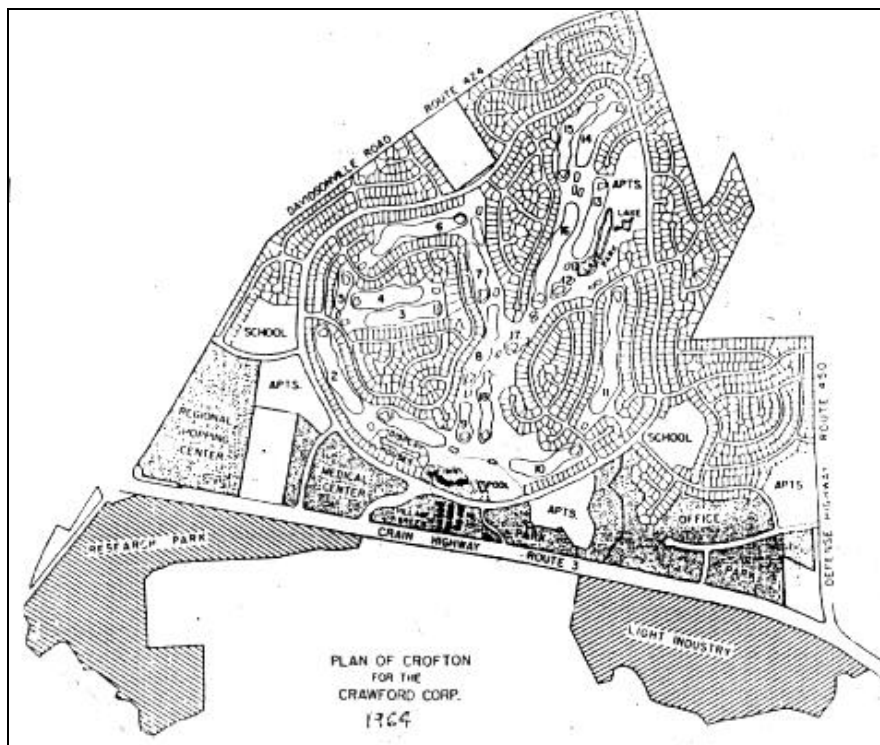
An intricate road system developed in the region connecting the various plantations with ports or crossings on the waterways. Others were built along ridges between rivers. The Crofton area, like much of Anne Arundel County, became the crossroads for a major network of roads that spanned the east coast and beyond. Route 3 roughly follows the path of an important colonial

roadway stretching from Philadelphia to Williamsburg. Established in the early 18th century, today's Route 424 was part of a north-south roadway known as Ridge Road. Several roads such as Bell Branch, Rossback, Rutland, St. Stephens Church, Underwood and Johns Hopkins Roads served as vital links in the region.

Rail transportation made an impact on the area. The Annapolis and Elkridge Railroad, one of the earliest railroads in the United States, was completed in 1840, linking Annapolis with the Washington, DC branch of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Crofton residents used the Waterbury or Millersville stations. Another important railroad for the Crofton area, the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad was established in 1868, connecting Baltimore and Washington. Today, it is the route of the Amtrak and MARC lines running through Odenton. These railroads enabled Crofton residents to make day-trips to Washington and Baltimore and facilitated access to new markets for local farmers.

The introduction of the automobile in the twentieth century virtually ended the agricultural way of life that had characterized Crofton since the 1600s. The State funded construction of Defense (Rt. 450) and Crain (Rt. 3) Highways through the area in the 1920s, stimulated the growth of suburban development. The present community of Crofton was founded in the early 1960s on 1,272 acres owned by the Crofton Corporation, a division of the Crawford Corporation, named for its principal, an architect then practicing in the area. The community was centered around a golf course and surrounded by Crofton Parkway, a large loop road within the larger

“triangle” formed by three major state routes: MD Routes 3 and 450, and Davidsonville Road (Route 424). That original community plan remains essentially intact nearly 35 years later, although considerable expansion has occurred outside the “Triangle,” mostly to the north where a number of major Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) have developed since the mid 1970s.

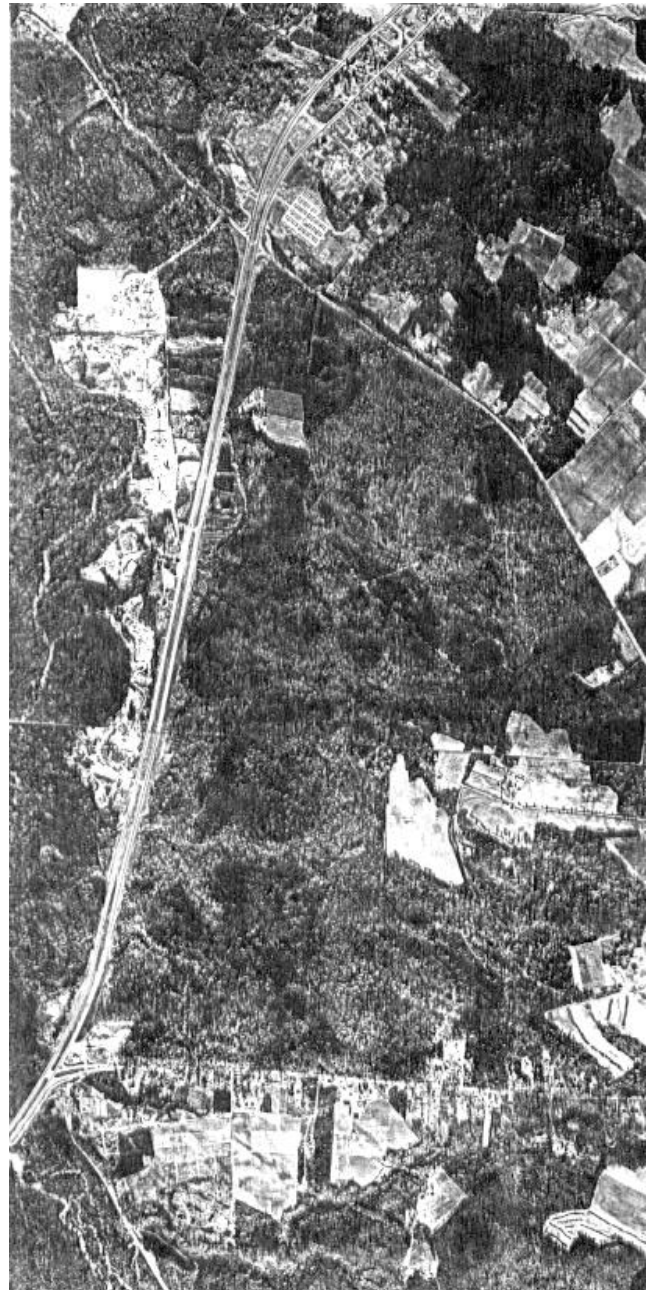


Development of the New Community

In January 1962 the area was mostly wooded with clearings for only a couple farms within the Triangle. Route 3 was already a divided highway, with extensive gravel operations stretching along the west side, along with several homes midway, and housing had developed continuously along the south side of Route 450, subdivided on long narrow lots. However, relatively few homes had been built along Route 424. Just north of its intersection with MD 3 there was a trailer park and elementary school next to the old community of Conway, with homes and businesses already developed in the median of the divided highway.

In the original layout for Crofton, a 200 acre golf course was an integral part of the plan, but remains to this day privately owned. About 60 acres was set aside for public use, about half for two elementary school sites and the other half for “parks and drainage ways,” presumably deeded to the community association. This did not include Lake Louise in Crofton’s “front yard”, which was deeded over to the Civic Association in 1988 as part of a complex agreement with the private corporation which owns the golf course and other commercial property along Route 3.

Another key element in the original plan was a Village Green, which provided for local office needs, restaurant and retail space in the heart of the community.



1962 Photo of the Crofton Triangle prior to development

The Crofton Civic Association was established at the outset with covenants on all property to support its operating budget. In 1997, the supplementary tax rate was 26 cents / \$100 assessed value, supporting a budget of \$568,000. Association bylaws require a quorum of 75 property owners in attendance at the annual meeting to approve any spending increases from year to year.



The original plan also proposed a 52 ac. “Regional Shopping Center” at the intersection of MD Routes 3 and 424. (This was later scaled down to about 30 acres for “Crofton Centre”, a conventional strip center of 329,000 sq.ft. with Kmart and a large supermarket as anchor stores.) The remaining 21 acres was earmarked for “Crofton Towers”, a high-rise project which was never completed; garden apartments were ultimately built there.

References:

1. Ware, Donna, *Anne Arundel’s Legacy: The Historic Properties of Anne Arundel County*. Annapolis: Anne Arundel County, 1990.
2. Kelly, Jacques, *Anne Arundel County: A Pictorial History*. Norfolk: The Donning Company.
3. Browne, Joseph L., *From Sotweed to Suburbia: A History of the Crofton, Maryland Area, 1660-1960*. Baltimore: Gateway Press, Inc.
4. Bradford, James C., *Anne Arundel County, Maryland: A Bicentennial History, 1649-1977*. Annapolis: Anne Arundel County.