

## **IV. COMMUNITY HISTORY**

Location and geography have shaped the rich history and diverse development of the Lake Shore Small Planning Area. Its place-name of Lake Shore, however, belies its predominant geographical feature. This massive peninsula, situated at the mouth of the Patapsco River, consists of many smaller peninsulas, islands and waterways. Flanked on the north by Rock Creek and on the south by the Magothy River, it extends eastward into the Chesapeake Bay at the entrance to Baltimore Harbor.

The miles of shoreline and navigable creeks fostered a lifestyle of water-related activities and economic pursuits for its inhabitants. Native Americans found the shoreline of the Lake Shore Planning Area a particularly excellent location for their seasonal harvesting of oysters and fish from the Chesapeake Bay. Evidence of this intensive harvesting activity, in the form of oyster shell middens, can be found along the Bay and date mainly from 500 A. D. to 1400 A. D. One such midden measures 2000 feet long by 700 feet wide.

Native Americans are known to have existed in Anne Arundel County as far back as 11,000 B. C. Because of its proximity to the Garmen Site, an early camp near Marley Station Mall, the earliest known sites in the Lake Shore Planning Area date to 10,000 B. C. and consist of small extractive camps. One such camp, now known as the Magothy Quartzite Quarry is located just west of the planning area. Beginning about 12,000 years ago, Native Americans used the quarry as a production center for extracting material for making high quality tools, projectile points and other lithics. This extremely rare geological formation consists of opaline-cemented quartz, a material that is found in very few places in the world. The quarry no doubt spawned a vast and long-lived trading network among native peoples. The area's geographical position within a larger regional system of migratory and trade routes created the first trails and footpaths, which later became the early transportation routes of the County's European settlers.

When the first European settlement of Anne Arundel County occurred in 1649, the native Algonquin tribes had virtually abandoned the present day area of the County due to raids by the warlike Susquahannocks from the north. The first settlers were Protestant Englishmen from Virginia who established a hamlet known as Providence at the mouth of the Severn River. Europeans may have visited the Lake Shore Planning Area prior to 1649. A clay tobacco pipe, dating to the 1630s, was found on Gibson Island in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, suggesting that the inhabitants of Maryland's first settlement at nearby Kent Island most likely frequented the western shores of the Bay as well. After 1650, the population quickly increased, primarily along the shoreline of the Bay and its tributaries. However, settlement of the interior of the County was delayed due, in part, to the apparent threat of Native Americans occupying lands west of Anne Arundel County. In the 1680s, Indian raids were still being reported on plantations at the upper branches of the South River. During this time, the early settlers exploited the interior region of the planning area for its vast resources, such as timber and wild game.

The first land patent in the area was made in 1652 by Thomas Wellborne, a London

merchant, for 1200 acres on the Magothy River at Cape Sable, now known as North Ferry Point. Other patents followed, of which the most prominent landowners were Charles Carroll of Annapolis and John Gray. Tenant farmers worked the land, growing tobacco, corn and grains. The region's plentiful stands of timber were harvested. Grist and sawmills soon followed.

The northern boundary of Anne Arundel County fluctuated several times during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. With the creation of Baltimore County in 1659, the northeast portion of Anne Arundel, north of the Magothy River, went to Baltimore County. Inhabitants of the peninsula petitioned the General Assembly numerous times to return to Anne Arundel County. In 1696, the legislature returned about half of the peninsula to the County, making the division line halfway between the Patapsco and the Magothy Rivers. Finally, in 1726, the Patapsco River became the northern boundary for Anne Arundel.

The planning area played an important role in events leading up to the American Revolutionary War, as the scene of one of the earliest naval engagements between colonists and the British. In May 1776, a British fleet including the *Otter* anchored at the mouth of the Patapsco near Bodkin Point in an attempt to blockade the Chesapeake Bay. The commander of the *Otter* did capture an American vessel; however, they were soon routed and driven from the Patapsco. Again in 1777, the residents witnessed another attempt by the British to gain control of Baltimore harbor and the Bay. One year later, many of the peninsula's inhabitants signed Maryland's Oath of Fidelity, including members of the Boone, Gray, Hancock, Hanshaw, Johnson, Linstid, Meek, Rockhold, Jacobs, and Robinson families. Those that actually served in the war included, Charles Robinson, John Boone, Samuel Jacobs, James Fowler, John Johnson, Leonard Foreman, John, William and Stephen (Jr.) Hancock.

In 1785, shortly after the close of the Revolutionary War, Private Stephen Hancock, Jr. of the Maryland Line, built a one-room stone dwelling on his family's property at Bodkin Point. Payments from his war service may have helped to fund construction of what was then a very fine house for a middling farmer. Here, Hancock raised a family, farmed the land and harvested the Bay. His descendants still live in the area today. The stone house was added onto in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and survives today, having been recently restored through the efforts of the Friends of Hancock's Resolution, Anne Arundel County, Historic Annapolis Foundation, the Maryland Historical Trust and the State of Maryland. It is the oldest standing structure in the planning area, and in the northern third of the County.

The Hancocks and other Lake Shore residents once again witnessed and participated in encounters with the British during the War of 1812. Several inhabitants served in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Maryland Regiment under Captain Francis Hancock, son of Stephen Hancock Jr. They defended the shores of the Patapsco and the Bay along the Bodkin Peninsula. In addition to conducting raids on land to obtain food and water throughout the war, the British were successful in burning a schooner in Bodkin Creek on August 30, 1814. This tension culminated in the attempt to capture Fort McHenry in September of that year.

Prior to this now famous battle, Captain Hancock and his militia were positioned on Bodkin Point to guard the shore and warn Baltimore of the invading British fleet. Oral tradition credits Hancock and his men for using a signaling system, alerting Steeple House Farm at North Point of the approaching fleet.

Early mining efforts in the planning area were initiated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century at North Ferry Point (Cape Sable). John Gibson, for whom Gibson Island is named, was a partner with Richard Caton, Charles Carroll of Carrollton and others in the Cape Sable Company, which was formed in 1818 to search for coal and other mineral ores. At North Ferry Point they found marcasite, an iron disulfide. It was mined, processed, and shipped to Baltimore where it was apparently used at the Baltimore Iron Works, which also produced alum, an ingredient in making gunpowder. Marcasite was also used in the production of fertilizers and ink. This enterprise was aided by slave labor, including skilled coopers and blacksmiths. Due to financial difficulties, the company disbanded in 1832.

By the 19th century, the area had attracted numerous farming families. Although some tobacco remained in cultivation, a shift in the growing of wheat and corn to producing fruits and vegetables for the markets in Baltimore and as far as Boston and Montreal was underway. Known as truck farming, this livelihood proved profitable for farmers in northern Anne Arundel County. Seasonal laborers, mostly Eastern European immigrants from Baltimore, were used to harvest the crops for which they were paid in tokens made of brass, known as “pickers checks.” The laborers or “pickers” were brought to local farms where they lived for six to eight weeks during the harvest season. Although found elsewhere in the mid-Atlantic region, the extensive use of pickers checks is unique to Anne Arundel County. Truck farming remained a primary source of income in the northern part of the County well into the 20th century. Some of the larger farms were owned by the Schramm, Bottomley, Schmidt, Cook, Calvert, Stinchcomb, Klingelhofer, and Jenkins families.

Many farmers relied on the waterways to transport their crops to Baltimore markets. Some owned specialized boats, such as buy boats and market boats. In addition to this bevy of diverse watercraft carrying local produce, watermen plied and harvested neighboring rivers, creeks and the Bay. The Chesapeake oyster fleet frequented the waters off the Bodkin peninsula well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

West of the planning area, on the Marley Neck Peninsula, the African-American community of Freetown was established in the 1840s by free blacks. This area became one of the largest population centers of free blacks, outside of Annapolis, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Early landowners included James Spencer, William Howard, Nathan Owens, William Turner, Abraham Franklin and William Hall, all of who were either freeborn or manumitted from slavery, according to pre-Civil War Certificates of Freedom. Both Spencer and Howard served in the Union Army U. S. Colored Troops during the Civil War. By the 1880s, these early landowners and their descendants had amassed nearly 1000 acres of land stretching between Marley and Stony Creeks in the southern portion of the Marley Neck peninsula. There, they established a safe-haven, building houses,

schools and churches.

The Freetown School, (the present-day community center) built in the 1920s, still survives and numbers among the handful of historic Rosenwald Schools in Anne Arundel County. Initiated by Julius Rosenwald, the president of Sears, Roebuck Company between 1911 and 1932, the Rosenwald School Fund was an ambitious program designed to provide better educational facilities for rural African Americans in the South. Inspired by Booker T. Washington, Rosenwald provided matching funds to black communities for school construction. Thousands of schools, some of which are still standing today, were built across the South using this fund.

Within the Lake Shore Planning Area, post Civil War African-American communities developed in the vicinity of Jacobsville. Johnstontown and the community centered around the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church still retain their identities to this day. The Rosenwald School, situated adjacent to the church was built in the 1920s to serve African American children in this community. Today it functions as the church hall.

In 1895-1896, the northern tip of Rock Point peninsula, known as Rock Point Farm, was condemned by the United States government for the purpose of erecting fortifications to defend the City of Baltimore. Fort Smallwood, named for Maj. General William Smallwood, commander of the Maryland Line during the Revolutionary War, was one of several batteries erected as part of the "Endicott" fortification system along the U. S. coast. It is a low semi-circular concrete embankment, which was originally covered with earth on the waterside, making it appear as a natural rise in topography. The upper level contained two "disappearing" gun emplacements, while the lower level housed the powder house and magazine. A frame barracks still survives and is situated southwest of the fort. In 1927, the fort property became part of the City of Baltimore's park system.

The beaches along the shoreline of the Lake Shore Planning Area became popular destinations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly with Baltimore citizens seeking nearby resorts for bathing and relaxation. Access became commercially possible in 1883 with the formation of the Stony Creek Steamship Company and the Rock Creek Steamship Company. Excursionists arrived in droves at such places as Colonial Beach and Fairview Park on Rock Creek, now the Maryland Yacht Club. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, steamers brought vacationers to numerous small resorts on Rock and Stony Creeks that included hotels, picnic pavilions, and amusement parks. In addition to Colonial and Fairview, other well-known places included Kurtz Pleasure Beach, Alpine Beach, Cottage Grove, Maryland Beach, and Fort Smallwood Park. African Americans established their own resorts, including amusement parks, picnic groves and dancing pavilions. One such resort known as Brown's Grove on Rock Creek, was served by its own steamship. In 1948, Rev. Hiram Smith, a Baptist pastor, created Beachwood, a beach and amusement park on the Magothy River. Today, this property is part of the Anne Arundel County parks system.

Seasonal recreation communities were also established in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for

those who could spend longer amounts of time in this desirable location. Both Pinehurst-on-the-Bay and Gibson Island were founded in 1922 as private recreational communities. Gibson Island was designed by the Olmsted Brothers; the premier landscape-design company in the United States at that time.

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the Lake Shore Planning Area slowly began to change and intensify in residential development. Like most of northern Anne Arundel County, its historical character as a productive farming region gradually gave way to the ever-increasing expansion of the Baltimore and Washington metropolitan area and the resultant traffic congestion. However, the area's numerous waterways and Bay frontage remains its most attractive asset. Preservation of this precious environmental setting has been a recent effort by residents who have championed the conservation of natural bogs and wetlands and helped to establish the Magothy Greenway. The Lake Shore community has transformed from a rural area of small crossroads to an attractive and desirable residential area in northeastern Anne Arundel County.