

## **Community History**

### **Location**

The Severn Small Area, located just south of BWI Airport, encompasses the heart of northern Anne Arundel County. Headwaters for three major rivers, Patapsco, Patuxent and Severn, have their origins in the Severn area. This strategic geographical position has directed its historical development.

The Severn Small Area's relatively flat terrain, with its rich supply of fresh water streams, was attractive to its earliest inhabitants. Prehistoric people utilized the abundant natural resources of this area as early as 11,000 B. C. Evidence of many extractive sites, where Native Americans camped for short periods of time while exploiting the natural resources of the area, can still be found here. These people were drawn to the area for its abundant animal and plant life and its access to fresh water. The earliest known Paleo-Indian site (11,000 B. C.) in Maryland was discovered near BWI Airport by archaeologists a decade ago. Another recent find, near Marley Station Mall, revealed evidence of the earliest intact cooking hearths in Maryland (8000 B. C.). These discoveries underscore the importance of the Severn region to Native Americans.

The area's geographical position between watersheds created a region of high passable ground suitable for trails and footpaths. Native Americans, who were in constant movement between the uplands, the rivers and the Chesapeake Bay, utilized these paths, which were also part of a larger regional system of migratory and trade routes.

### **Early Settlement**

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. The population quickly increased, primarily along the shoreline of the Bay and its tributaries. Inland areas, like the Severn area, were used for resource extraction and supported a limited number of plantations due to the apparent threat of Native Americans occupying lands west of Anne Arundel County.

Based on archival research conducted in 1994 by Raymond Ringgold, a Severn resident, many early landowners of the Severn area, including Young, Pinkstone (Pinxton), Todd, Hammond, Carroll, Griffith and Worthington, were members of prominent families who actually lived further east along the Severn River Watershed. In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, they and their descendants and subsequent owners amassed large tracts of land ranging from several hundred to several thousand acres, indicating that it was primarily an area of resource extraction, specifically timber. In addition, iron ore outcrops existed along Stony Run and Piney Run, a resource that did not go unnoticed by these early industrially-minded landowners. The existence of both iron and timber facilitated the emergence of the iron smelting industry in the region. In

the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century, the Snowdens developed an extensive iron furnace operation, known as Patuxent Furnace, located on present day Fort Meade. The Dorsey's commenced two similar operations at Elkrige Landing, northwest of Severn, and at Curtis Creek, in present day Glen Burnie. The rich reserves of timber and iron ore in the Severn area were exploited by these industries well into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Early Roads and Industry**

Just as Native Americans utilized the higher ground between watersheds for early trails, so did the Europeans. Early colonial roads, the earliest being Ridge Road and Annapolis Road (MD 175) crossed the Severn area. Ridge Road was part of an early north-south system, while Annapolis Road connected Annapolis with Frederick and beyond. Both roads, and their precursors, are depicted on the 1794 Dennis Griffith *Map of the State of Maryland*. Another early road that most likely dates to the 1700s follows the present day course of Burns Crossing and Clark Station Roads. Research conducted by Mr. Ringgold indicates that this route was mentioned in an 1840 land record as the "public road leading from the Forks of Patuxent through the Piney Woods to the City of Baltimore." Others, shown on the 1860 *Martenet's Map of Anne Arundel County, Maryland*, include Telegraph, Reece, New Cut, and Old Mill Roads. The date of the construction and naming of Telegraph Road has not been researched, but it must have occurred in the late 1840s or 1850s, after Samuel Morse sent his now famous message in 1844 from Baltimore to Washington, D.C.

Farming did not become a significant industry in the Severn area until the early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century. The limited number of plantations that existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century grew tobacco, corn and grains. Tobacco was packed into hogshead and taken to Indian Landing, a tobacco inspection station located on the upper reaches of the Severn River. Due to its strategic location, planters in the Severn area also had the ability to access ports or wharves on the upper ends of the Patuxent and Patapsco Rivers. Corn and grains were also transported to these wharves, but by the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a grist and sawmill was established on Severn Run. Known first as the Pumphrey and Cecil Mill and later Lowman Mill, corn and grains were ground here for local consumption. The sawmill also served the local community. The ruins of this mill are barely visible today.

The development of a better road system in the early 1800s, and the arrival of the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad in 1868, followed by the Washington, Baltimore & Annapolis Electric Railway in 1908, changed the Severn area dramatically. The growing of fruits and vegetables proliferated as the Severn area became part of the regional system of truck farming. Farmers found a ready market for these products in the growing metropolitan regions of Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

Town development in the Severn area, like the remainder of Anne Arundel County, never amounted to more than crossroad villages or small railroad station communities that served the local surroundings. The location of train stations created nodes of small development, including stores, post offices, blacksmith shops, schools and a handful of residences. Stations established on the Baltimore & Potomac and WB&A lines within the planning area included Severn, Harmans, Smith, Elmhurst, Thompson or Delmont, and Clark. Severn became the prominent

village in the area with a population of 150 in 1878. In addition to the railroad station, the town supported a store and post office, and had a resident blacksmith, carpenter, wheelwright, and attorney. The *Maryland Directory* of 1878 listed nineteen farmers in the Severn area, including members of the Boyer, Clark, Durner, Dyson, Gardner, Harman, Perkins, Ray, Shipley and Wheat families. Harmans, located north of Severn on the B & P Railroad, had a population of 60 in 1878, and like Severn, cultivation of fruits and vegetables for Baltimore markets was the main livelihood. Eighteen farmers are listed in the 1878 *Directory* for the Harmans area with J. W. Shipley as the postmaster. The village supported a general merchandise store, three carpenters and a blacksmith.

### **Historic Structures**

The surviving historic structures in the Severn Planning Area reflect its period of most intensive development, the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. One of the earliest is the John Lowman House on Telegraph Road (MD 170) that dates to the 1840s and was expanded circa 1908. The Basil Smith Farm, also located east of Telegraph Road, includes a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century farmhouse with an earlier log constructed wing. Built in the 1840s, it served as the original dwelling for the Smith Family. The farm also includes a slave quarter constructed of native ironstone (sandstone), a rare survivor in this region, and a family graveyard. Both the Lowman and Smith farms have been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Other historic buildings in the Severn area date to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century when the region experienced rapid growth in the truck farming industry. These farms include Piney Run (Roderick O. Shipley Farmhouse), Adam Alexander Shipley Farm, J. A. Disney Farm, Rupert Smith Farm, Lyndall Warfield House, and Kelly/Hawkins House. Built in 1867 and expanded in 1892, the Ridge Methodist Church on Ridge Road (present day Hanover Assembly of God) is one of the few surviving 19<sup>th</sup> Century churches in the area.

African Americans established the Queenstown, originally called Burleytown, community after the Civil War. Most of the dwellings date to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Queenstown School, present day Queenstown Community Center, was built in 1932 for the education of African Americans in the Queenstown vicinity. It was one of 24 Rosenwald Schools built in Anne Arundel County, of which seven survive. Rosenwald Schools were constructed using matching funds provided by the Julius Rosenwald Fund, named for the president of Sears, Roebuck & Company in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Between 1917 and 1932, the Rosenwald Fund was responsible for the construction of over 5,300 schools for African Americans in the rural south. Due to its national significance, the Queenstown School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.



The Queenstown School was built in 1932. It is one of 24 Rosenwald Schools built in Anne Arundel County. Today the building is used as the meeting place for the Severn Improvement Association and as a day care facility.

Other 20<sup>th</sup> Century structures of historical and architectural significance include the John Blob House on Wright Road, located in the heart of the proposed Dorchester Subdivision Development. Built in 1929, this Georgian Revival dwelling is constructed of rock-faced cast concrete block. As a highly decorative and rare example of this type of construction in Anne Arundel County, the Blob House has also been determined eligible for the National Register. The Fields House, another colonial revival style house, located on the north side of MD 175 near the Baltimore Washington Parkway, was built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century on the site of the Elzey House, home of Confederate Major General Arnold Elzey.

Farming remained the predominant industry in the area well into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Even up to the early 1980s, the area supported many farms growing fruits and vegetables for local consumption. With the growth of Fort Meade, the National Security Agency, and BWI Airport, as well as suburban growth of Baltimore and Washington D.C., the Severn Small Area began a dramatic transformation from farmland to suburbia.