

Chapter 3

Historical Background

Lying between the Magothy and Severn Rivers, the Severna Park planning area is located in the heart of Anne Arundel County. Like much of the county, it was once a farming region with a few small crossroad towns, including Benfield, Robinson, Earleigh Heights, Pasadena, and Boone (present-day Severna Park). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, summer communities, such as Round Bay, were developed along the shores of the Severn and Magothy Rivers.

For thousands of years prior to European settlement of the Chesapeake Bay region, the area supported a Native American population. They hunted, fished and lived along the Bay and its tributaries, benefitting from the great bounty of the land and water. The first European settlers of the Severna Park area adopted an agricultural lifestyle, growing tobacco and corn. Europeans arrived as landowners, tenant farmers, or indentured servants, while many Africans arrived primarily as slaves and free blacks who practiced a trade and/or owned property. Only a few of the early plantation houses have survived in the Severna Park Area. The Robinson House, a rare stone-constructed dwelling was built in the mid-18th century along an early north-south route connecting Baltimore and Annapolis. It still stands on the east side of B&A Boulevard, surrounded by the community of Berrywood.

By the 19th century, farmers were growing vegetables and fruits; the soils in the Severna Park area were better suited for these crops. Many farmers participated in the truck farming industry, a method of farming using seasonal immigrant labor during harvest season. Their products found receptive markets in Baltimore and Washington, via rail and steamboat transportation. Several tomato canneries were established in the county in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, one of which was located in Pasadena. J. C. Schultz of Pasadena produced the "Anne Arundel Pride" label, boasting tomatoes that were grown and hand packed in Anne Arundel County.

The arrival of the railroad in the Severna Park area brought sweeping changes in the lifestyles of its residents. It provided many people in Baltimore, Annapolis and Washington, with the opportunity to move out of the large cities, and into a quieter, more rural area. In 1887, the Annapolis and Baltimore Shortline Railroad was constructed between the two cities. Shortly thereafter, its name was changed to the Baltimore & Annapolis Shortline (the B & A), and by the early 20th century it was part of the Washington, Baltimore and Annapolis Railroad (the W, B, & A). Stations were established serving the local farming community and the growing resort communities along the Severn and Magothy Rivers. The present-day Ranger Station on the B & A Hiking-Biking Trail was built in 1889 as Frost's Store. It also served as a station and ticket office on the B & A Railroad, first known as Frost and later, Earleigh Heights. In 1889, the resort community of Round Bay was created, including a waterfront hotel, boardwalk, dance pavilion, and bathhouse. Access to the station at Round Bay was on a spur line of the B & A Railroad.

Steam-operated trains became electric in 1908, bringing with them faster, more luxurious travel and an increase in regular service. This gave rise to the development of "streetcar suburbs" along its route, including Linthicum Heights and Severna Park. Between the accessibility, convenience, and new improvements, the new railroad found great popularity in Severna Park. At its prime in the 1920's, as many as 1.75 million passengers per year traveled between Baltimore and Annapolis, with trains leaving every half-hour during peak times.

Major road construction projects of the 20th century have affected the growth and development of the Severna Park area. In 1908, Governor Austin Crothers authorized the construction of a paved road system in Maryland, one of which was the meandering B & A Boulevard, connecting Baltimore and Annapolis. Two decades later, a modern concept in road construction was built linking the two cities. Designed as a scenic route, the Governor Ritchie Highway quickly became a catalyst for residential and commercial development.