

MORE



The Building of an American City

Sherry H. Olson

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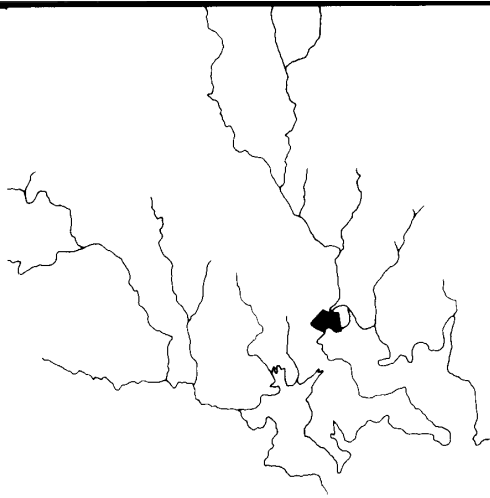
Introduction

There is a tempo and a pattern to urban growth—a dance of larger sweep from generation to generation, as brick rows and marble steps extend over the landscape, as people do their social climbing or take a fall, and move around the corner or up the hill or out to the valley. This book is organized to reflect that rhythm as it was experienced in the neighborhoods of Baltimore. City growth is a boom-and-bust sequence of “long swings,” with eighteen years or so separating the neighboring peaks. This applies equally to North America and Europe over at least two centuries, and to much of the world in the last hundred years.

The reader may not find here, therefore, all he wants to know about Baltimore. The outsider may find that this portrait does not match his private image of the city: baseball, softshell crabs, Eubie Blake at the piano, or Blaze Star on the Block. Some of Baltimore’s choice gifts to the nation are not even mentioned: Harriet Tubman’s underground railroad, Albert Fink’s bridges, Babe Ruth, or Edgar Allan Poe. Others appear in the cast of the book, but not in their greatest roles: Frederick Douglass and Isaac Myers as national figures in the black struggle, Henrietta Szold in American Jewish scholarship or world Zionism, Charles Carroll as maker of the constitution or Judge Taney as its interpreter, H. L. Mencken adding to the American language and American literary criticism, Tom Winans building railroads in Russia, or the mark of The Johns Hopkins University on graduate education. Neglected utterly are the military exploits of the Maryland colonels and sea captains, and the eight thousand crosses in rows in the national cemeteries at Baltimore.

If these glories are neglected, what remains? This book is about city building, an internal dynamic of the city-state, and how Baltimoreans see themselves and their situation. In that sense, Baltimore is America, in its rhythm of building up and tearing down, swarming and dispersing, getting and spending, birthing and dying, sharing and competing. Just as the story of one farm or quarter-section of forest, a single square in the counterpane of America, lends an understanding of the processes that formed the landscape, so Baltimore is one square in the great cotillion of the cities.

Some dimensions of Baltimore life must remain understated because they are given their due elsewhere. Excellent modern histories focus on the party politics and political leadership of successive generations in Maryland. The generals and the jurists have their biographies, and there are new works each



Original shoreline, drainage, and sixty-acre site of Baltimore Town, 1729.



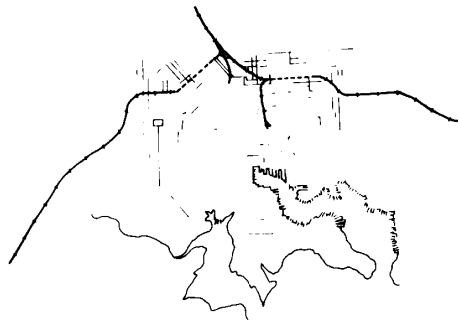
Streets of Baltimore, Jones Town (Oldtown), and Fell's Point, as developed between 1745 and 1788.



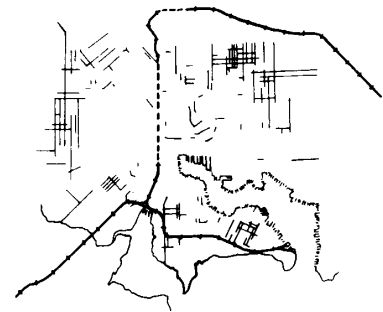
Streets developed from 1789 to 1801.

year on Baltimore clipper ships, locomotives, steamboats, or streetcars. The interested reader can turn to other books for such detail.

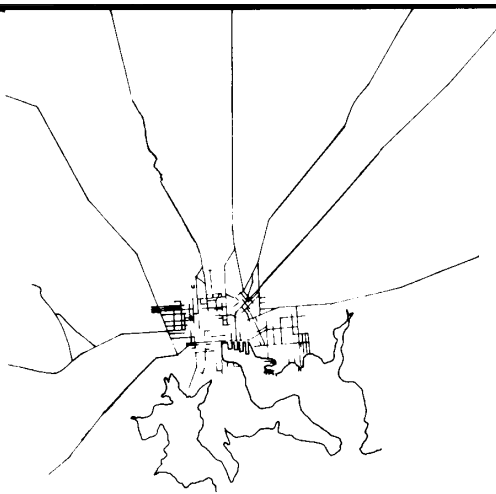
Other dimensions are understated because we know too little about them. The most serious gap is our ignorance of the lives of slaves and servants in Baltimore, the urban economy of servitude and its extinction. Another hole in written history is the transplantation of the Polish Catholic community—uprooted from the old world village, heeled in to urban squalor, then thriving in tidy rows of marble steps. A third missing link is an account of the strategies of landowners and real estate investors in each round. Here the reader can only be advised to look out the window and read the landscape. Baltimore possesses some magnificent sources for the books that must be written to fill these gaps. In addition to the resources of the Enoch Pratt Library, the Peabody collection, The Johns Hopkins University library, and the Maryland Historical Society—to all of which I am indebted—there are a barely scratched wealth of maps and surveys, and wonderfully indexed land records and legal archives. In the land-



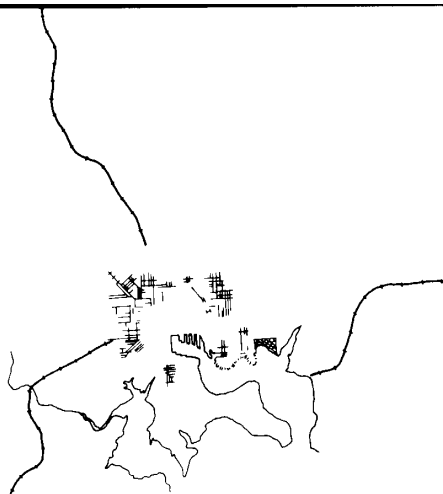
Streets opened between 1866 and 1877 and railroad tunnels connecting the Pennsylvania Railroad system, built ca. 1872 (Baltimore & Potomac Railroad to the west and Union Railroad to the east).



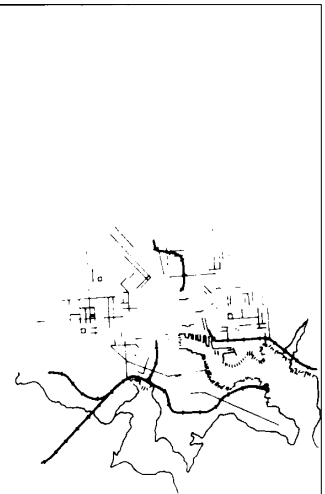
Streets opened from 1878 to 1899 and B&O Railroad tunnels and crossover, built ca. 1893.



Streets and turnpike roads developed between 1802 and 1821.



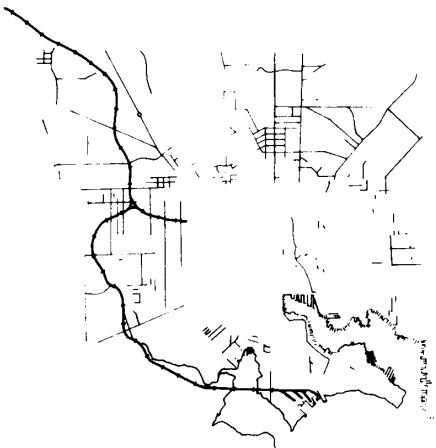
Streets opened between 1822 and 1837 and railroads built by 1837 (B&O Railroad to the southwest, Baltimore & Susquehanna Railroad to the north, and Baltimore & Port Deposit Railroad to the east).



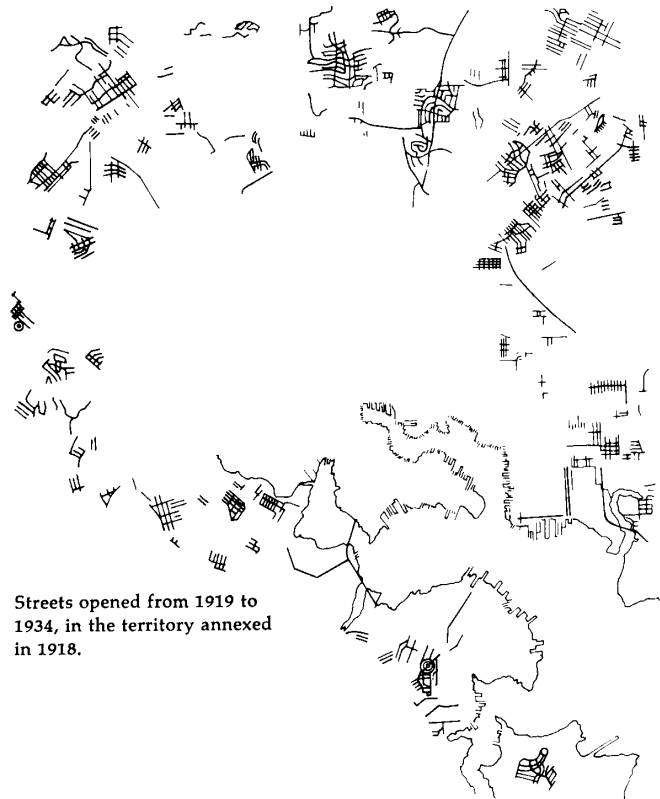
Streets opened from 1838 to 1864 and railroad extensions toward the waterfront.

scape itself, the city's social record is built into its dwellings, and its technological history is imprinted in the industrial buildings and engineering works.

Meanwhile, a twelfth generation of children of all colors of ribbons and races plays hopscotch on the sidewalks, correcting with chalk a "standard American" grid to match Baltimore tradition, hopping and giggling and waiting a turn, thinking not at all of grown-up games or the place of Baltimore in a hopscotch world.



Streets opened between 1900 and 1918, chiefly in the territory annexed in 1888, and the Western Maryland Railroad, as developed ca. 1903.



Streets opened from 1919 to 1934, in the territory annexed in 1918.

