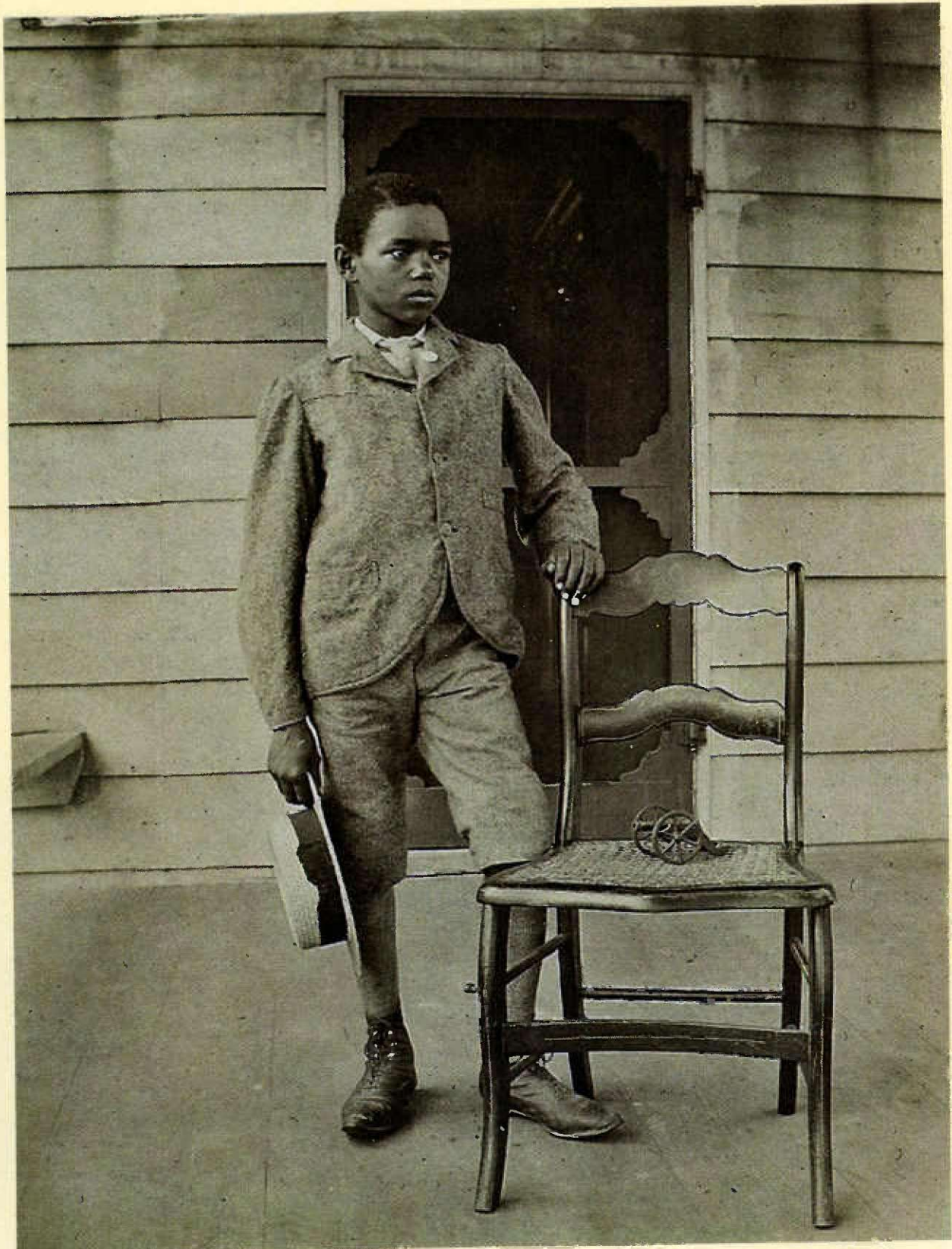


MARYLAND  
*Historical Magazine*

FALL/WINTER 2019





"Negro Life in Maryland," unknown photographer, c.1890-1900 Maryland Historical Society, H. Furlong Baldwin Library, Eastern Shore Photograph Collection, Album I, p. 37, IP83-i-18-2

# PUBLICATIONS

## AT THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Published since 1906, the *Maryland Historical Magazine* is the Maryland Historical Society's biannual, peer-reviewed journal. With a circulation of 3,500 per issue, it is an indispensable resource for scholars, teachers, families, librarians, archivists, students, independent researchers and the general public.

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Founded 1844

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# MARYLAND

## *Historical Magazine*

VOLUME 114, NO. 2 (Fall/Winter 2019)

### CONTENTS

From the Editor .....	149
The Rossborough Inn on the University of Maryland Campus: Two Centuries of Change.....	153
V. CAMILLE WESTMONT, DENNIS J. POGUE, MELISSA BUTLER, AND ELIZABETH TOTTEN	
A Certain Kind of Freedom: Black Agency in Talbot County, 1870–1910 .....	187
WILLIAM F. MESSNER	
Joe Gray and Nace Hopkins: Black Leadership in Talbot County, 1870–1901.....	203
WILLIAM F. MESSNER	
Brewington Book Prize 2020 Announcement .....	217
Book Reviews.....	219
Halpin, <i>A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865–1920</i> , by Edward C. Papenfuse .....	219
Bell, <i>Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home</i> , by Charles W. Mitchell .....	221
Terry, <i>The Struggle and the Urban South: Confronting Jim Crow in Baltimore before the Movement</i> , by Suzanne E. Chapelle.....	222
Index to Volume 114 .....	225

HALL OF RECORDS  
LIBRARY  
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Annapolis, MD

COVER: Taken by an anonymous photographer c.1890–1901 and initially published in James Dawson, ed., *100 Years of Change on the Eastern Shore: The Willis Family Journals, 1847–1951* (n.p.: published by Charles F. Willis III, 2014), this image is most likely of Lewis Roberts, the eleven-year-old son of Horace Roberts, a farm hand on the Clora Dorsey Farm. Reproduced with permission.

INSIDE COVER: “Negro Life in Maryland,” unknown photographer, c.1890–1900. Maryland Historical Society, H. Furlong Baldwin Library, Eastern Shore Photograph Collection, Album 11, p. 37, PP83-i-18-2



# From the Editor:

MARTINA KADO, Ph.D.

Dear readers,

**W**E ARE THRILLED to connect with you again by presenting our latest assemblage of new research on Maryland history. The guiding thread that formed in editing this issue was the interplay between local history and patterns that emerge on a broader scale: how do the preconceptions of big-picture thinking inform our approach to the small-scale events of a particular time and place? And in turn, how can the minutia of studying the past of one building, or the voices of one specific community, enrich our knowledge about the history of the state? As we explore why we remember—and memorialize—certain events, while others fall into obscurity, the discovery that is inherent to historical research opens up dialogue with today and tomorrow.

Our first article, “The Rossborough Inn on the University of Maryland Campus: Two Centuries of Change,” is a collaborative piece by V. Camille Westmont, Dennis J. Pogue, Melissa Butler, and Elizabeth Sara Totten. In 2016, the Office of Facilities Management at the University of Maryland commissioned a studio class in the Graduate Program in Historic Preservation to conduct a study of the past, present, and potential future uses of the Rossborough Inn—“the oldest standing structure on the [university’s] campus.” The result is a detailed, previously unrecorded history of the structure that chronicles its many past and present roles. Illustrated by accompanying images of architectural transformations, the Rossborough served as a tavern, tenant farm, agricultural experiment station, tea room, museum, and University of Maryland Faculty Club, among other roles—a series of metamorphoses that, in the two hundred years of one building, also reflects the history of Maryland during this time.

We are delighted that the authors chose the *Maryland Historical Magazine* to publish their findings, not least because their article leans on two themes covered in our previous issue: the travels of the Marquis de Lafayette between Baltimore and Washington, D.C., in 1824 and the history of agriculture in Maryland as evinced in the Maryland Agricultural College as the mid-nineteenth century precursor to the University of Maryland. Most importantly, this report serves as an exemplary roadmap for how research institutions can engage their own constituents in using institutional history to inform their decisions for future development.

Changing tack from historic preservation to African American history, this issue also features the first two of three articles by William F. Messner on free African American communities on Maryland’s Eastern Shore in the period following the Civil

War and into the first decade of the twentieth century. “A Certain Kind of Freedom: Black Agency in Talbot County, 1870–1910” contends that “black agency existed as a counterpoint to black subordination in Talbot County” during this period. Adding dimension to existing accounts that claim African American lives improved very little after the Civil War, “Black Agency” describes the vibrant changes that occurred in black demographics, education, political activity, and church life as opportunities opened up for African American women and men in terms of labor freedom.

Dr. Messner’s second article, “Joe Gray and Nace Hopkins: Black Leadership in Talbot County, 1870–1901,” adds specific examples to the more general outline provided in “Black Agency.” Following the parallels in the lives and accomplishments of two African American community leaders during this period, we learn about their enlistment in the Union Army during the Civil War, their subsequent struggles in acquiring and retaining ownership of land, and their varying successes in political activism in the face of racism. The fact that Nace Hopkins is remembered in his community to this day while Joe Gray remains in relative obscurity illustrates how precarious it was—and, in many ways, still is—for African Americans to assert their independence. Dr. Messner’s third article, “A Home of Their Own: African Americans and the Evolution of Unionville, Maryland,” will be published in a subsequent issue of the *Maryland Historical Magazine*. In the meantime, for comparison with nineteenth-century Western Maryland, we encourage our readers to revisit Constance M. McGovern’s article “Constructing Lives: Free People of Color in Antebellum Cumberland, Maryland” (*Maryland Historical Magazine*, vol. 110, no. 3, Fall 2015). In addition to relevant book titles available at our Museum Store ([shop.mdhs.org](http://shop.mdhs.org)), educators, parents, and younger readers are welcome to consult a variety of education resources on African American history for grades 4–12, available online at MdHS’s Historical Investigations Portal—HIP ([mdhs.org/education/your-computer/hip-historical-investigations-portal](http://mdhs.org/education/your-computer/hip-historical-investigations-portal)).

The last feature in this issue is the announcement of the Brewington Book Prize, awarded yearly by the Maryland Historical Society to an outstanding new title in maritime history. For 2020, the winner is Donald Grady Shomette’s *Anaconda’s Tail: The Civil War on the Potomac Frontier, 1861–1865*. Described by the MdHS’s Maritime Committee as “a non-traditional history book,” *Anaconda’s Tail* broadens the more common focus on land battles to include the Potomac as the site of military operations and the role of waterways in the Civil War.

Once again, we remain grateful to our submitting authors, readers, researchers, librarians, and contributing staff who make each issue of the *Maryland Historical Magazine* what it is: an ever-growing source of knowledge about Maryland and its place in the United States and the world.

All issues of the *Maryland Historical Magazine* are available online, free of charge, at [mdhs.org](http://mdhs.org). Printed copies are a benefit of membership in the Maryland Historical Society. To join, visit [mdhs.org/membership](http://mdhs.org/membership).



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*Historical Magazine*

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FIGURE 1. The Rossborough Inn today.

# The Rossborough Inn on the University of Maryland Campus: Two Centuries of Change

BY V. CAMILLE WESTMONT, DENNIS J. POGUE,  
MELISSA BUTLER, AND ELIZABETH TOTTEN

## Introduction

**N**ESTLED ON A TREE-SHADED STREET CORNER fronting Baltimore Avenue, it is easy to overlook the understated and unpretentious styling of the Rossborough Inn amongst the bustling University of Maryland, College Park campus. The Rossborough Inn is a two-and-a-half-story Federal style building, the oldest standing structure on the campus, and the only one to predate the university's founding. The fields and forests that surrounded the Rossborough when it was built over two centuries ago have been replaced by avenues, shopping centers, manicured lawns, and mid-rise multi-use commercial buildings. The local farmers and stagecoach passengers traveling between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore who

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Dennis J. Pogue has over forty years of experience as an archaeologist, museum administrator, educator, and historic preservationist. He is adjunct associate professor and interim director of the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Maryland, College Park. His articles have appeared in journals such as *Historical Archaeology*, *Winterthur Portfolio*, and the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, and in popular outlets such as *American History*, *Early American Life*, and *The Magazine Antiques*.

Melissa Butler is an architectural historian at Dovetail Cultural Resource Group and artist currently residing in Williamsburg, Virginia. She has worked on reconnaissance- and intensive-level projects from New Jersey to North Carolina and is trained in many aspects of historic preservation including photodocumentation, research, and architectural analysis, as well as oral history.

Elizabeth Sara Totten is a preservation planner with the Public Archaeology Lab in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Previously, she worked as a preservation officer at the Maryland Historical Trust. She was the Adolf Placzek Fellow for the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission in 2016. She holds an M.A. in literatures, cultures, and languages from the University of Connecticut, and a master's degree in historic preservation from the University of Maryland.

once passed before its front door have been replaced by students, professors, and commuters. As the greater Washington, D.C., metro area has expanded dramatically over the years, the Rossborough has likewise reflected the shifting times and the transformation of the surrounding community. Tracing the changing uses of the Rossborough in light of the associated social, economic, and cultural trends provides a deeper insight into the heritage value of the former inn and suggests how the structure could continue to contribute to the identity of the university. The Rossborough has experienced firsthand the technological advances and anxieties of the young Republic, witnessed the birth and development of Maryland's flagship university, and may continue to guide the university into the future as its role within campus life is reevaluated.

The building and grounds have been intertwined with the Calvert family of Riversdale, just a few miles distant, since its construction around 1803. Built as a stagecoach stop prior to the charter of the Baltimore-Washington Turnpike, the Rossborough served travelers of all stripes throughout the early nineteenth century, including General the Marquis de Lafayette during his triumphal tour of the nation in 1824. The founding of the Maryland Agricultural College and the subsequent sale of the Rossborough property to the college in 1858 began a long and fruitful relationship between the two institutions. The Rossborough was instrumental in the college's early research, including serving as the agricultural experiment station.<sup>1</sup>

The building, however, is largely unknown amongst University of Maryland students. In the fall of 2016, the university's planners enlisted the Historic Preservation Program studio class to investigate the history of the Rossborough and to make recommendations for the redevelopment of the structure as part of the proposed initiative to rebrand Baltimore Avenue. This work revealed a fascinating and lively history, which confirmed the date that the Rossborough was constructed as a stagecoach stop and then detailed its role in the university's early history. After many decades of decline, the building rose to prominence once more in the 1930s under the auspices of President Harry Byrd, before once again falling into obscurity in the late twentieth century. The Rossborough is a distinctive structure with an equally remarkable history, which deserves greater recognition on the University of Maryland, College Park campus.

## **Early History**

The land patents for the property on which Rossborough is situated date to the seventeenth century, but the story of the building begins in 1802 with Richard Ross. Ross was the proprietor of the successful Indian Queen tavern in nearby Bladensburg, and in that year he bought thirty-one acres from George Calvert, of Riversdale, to construct a second tavern. The Calverts were an English gentry family that founded the Maryland Colony, and served as the proprietors and governors for Maryland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the Calverts lost their political positions during the

American Revolution, they retained their wealth and lands in Maryland and England. George Calvert gained even more wealth through his marriage to Rosalie Stier, the daughter of an Antwerp burgher, Henri-Joseph Stier. Calvert used his wealth to acquire and selectively sell off land in the proximity of his home, Riversdale, including the tract on which the Rossborough would be built. By 1804, newspaper bulletins indicate that Ross's second tavern was in operation and was already a landmark in the area. Another publication from 1804, *The Traveler's Directory* from Philadelphia, identified a tavern or inn where the Rossborough stands today. The publication mistakenly labeled the stop as the "Indian queen," however, the name of Ross's first tavern located in Bladensburg.<sup>2</sup>

Prince George's County tax assessments confirm that the Rossborough was constructed in 1803. This finding is in conflict with earlier histories of the building, which generally cite a construction date of 1793 or 1798. These claims likely stem from the date "1793" molded in the Coade stone keystone above the main doorway. The 1793 date was simply a production mark and was not meant to be a construction date for the building. It is likely that some writers misread the 1793 molded date as 1798. This keystone appears in photographs that predate the later renovations of the building, indicating that the keystone is original to the structure. The keystone bears the image of Silenus, a god of wine and celebration, which aligns with the evidence suggesting that the Rossborough was purpose-built as a tavern. The later construction date is further supported by Prince George's County Tax Records, which list the land on which the Rossborough sits as "unimproved" in 1798.<sup>3</sup>

The timing of the construction and the location of the Rossborough was not a coincidence, as Richard Ross had been a major proponent of a toll road connecting Baltimore and Washington, D.C. In 1813, approximately a decade after Ross acquired and constructed his stagecoach stop, the Baltimore-Washington Turnpike was officially chartered. Traffic increased steadily along this important north-south route, and the Rossborough Inn became a landmark and stopping point for those traveling along the turnpike.<sup>4</sup>

Ross's foresight and political lobbying made his second tavern a success—just in time for it to be sold. Ross sold the Rossborough Inn to John Davis in 1814, shortly after the Baltimore-Washington Turnpike was chartered. Under Davis's management, and with

**Washington City & Georgetown**  
**STAGES,**  
*By way of M'Coy's, Davis's (Rossburg) & Bladensburg.*  
**THE COACHEE**  
**VIGILANCE & } Stages**  
**U. S. MAIL**

**START** every morning from the Office next to Gadsby's Indian Queen Hotel—  
On the two former at 6 o'clock, the latter (admitting only six passengers) & recently removed  
to this office, at 5

All these Stages arrive at M'Keon's (formerly Davis') and O'Neal's,  
Washington City, and Crawford's, Georgetown, two hours previous to the departure of the  
**STAGE COACH FOR ALEXANDRIA & FREDERICKSBURG**, in which passengers in the a-  
bove lines going further, south, who prefer this mode of conveyance to the Stages, have a pre-  
ference.

**AND FOR THE FURTHER ACCOMMODATION OF THE PUBLIC,**  
for the purpose of these persons not wishing to start so early, **THE PROPRIETORS on Friday the 1st**  
**of September, intend running the**

**PILOT THROUGH TO WASHINGTON in 7 Hours,**  
taking its departure every morning at 7 o'clock, and carrying only **SEVEN PASSENGERS.**  
New Stages and fresh Horses have been placed on the road, and the owners  
pledge themselves that every attention shall be paid to the accommodation of passengers tra-  
veling in these lines. Fare of each passenger on all of them \$4, with an allowance of 25 lbs  
Luggage—150 lbs. extra, equal to each passenger; and all baggage, to be at the risk of the owner  
or owners thereof.

<b>JACOB G. SMITH,</b>	}	<i>Baltimore.</i>
<b>JNO. GADSBY,</b>		
<b>STOCKTON &amp; CLARKE,</b>	}	<i>Washington.</i>
<b>HY. M'COY, Elk Ridge.</b>		
<b>JNO. DAVIS, Rossburg.</b>	}	<i>Georgetown.</i>
<b>DANL. M'KEOWN,</b>		
<b>WM. O'NEAL,</b>	}	<i>Washington.</i>
<b>WM. CRAWFORD,</b>		

**THE PILOT**  
Starts, as heretofore, for Philadelphia, **EVERY MORNING AT 3 O'CLOCK,**  
limited to Seven Passengers, and reaches Philadelphia the same evening. This line has lat-  
erly been much improved, and arrangements have been made by the owners for its arrival at  
an earlier hour, both in Baltimore and Philadelphia.

**'THE MAIL STAGE**  
To York and Lancaster, starts **EVERY MORNING** at 2 o'clock, dines in York, and  
arrives in Lancaster by dusk.

**STOCKTON & CLARKE,**  
August 26, 1815. d14/2w1m

FIGURE 2. Advertisement mentioning a stop at Rossburg, printed in the *Baltimore Patriot and Evening Advertiser*, 1815. Readex/America's Historical Newspapers database

the help of a small staff, including a stage-office keeper from Pennsylvania named Hugh Graham, the increased stagecoach traffic meant that the Rossborough Inn continued to be a popular stop. In 1815, an advertisement for the “Rossburg” appeared in a bulletin



FIGURE 3. Map of Maryland with the location of the “Rossburg” marked, engraved by G. W. Bonton, 1838. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, Maryland Map Collection, Maryland 1838, MD 031

published by the *Baltimore Patriot and Evening Advertiser* (Figure 2).<sup>5</sup>

Although the building is now officially referred to as the “Rossborough Inn,” it has been known by several different names over the years. Before standardization in the 1930s, the property was referred to as the Inn at Rossburg, Ross’s Tavern, Ross’s Inn, Rossburg House, Rossburg Dwelling, and the Rossburg Farm. These names reflect the changing function of the building and identity throughout its first hundred years of service. Before 1892, however, the most common names for the building were Rossburg or Rossberg.

## Tavern and Inn

While the Rossborough continued to serve travelers between Washington and Baltimore, events taking place elsewhere in Prince George’s County would have direct implications for the future of the inn. In 1821, George Calvert’s wife, Rosalie, died, leaving George with control of the family’s sizable estate. George Calvert invested the fortune in real estate in Prince George’s and surrounding counties. Calvert, who had sold the land on which the Rossborough is located to Richard Ross in 1802, reacquired the property in 1822 and added the surrounding farmland to his estate. During this time, the Rossborough continued to serve as an inn and developed a reputation for offering good food and congenial accommodations.<sup>6</sup>

Several twentieth-century sources claim that notable early American figures, including Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and John Quincy Adams, frequented the establishment, but only one famous guest has been confirmed as having stayed at the Rossborough during its time as an inn. In October 1824, during his triumphal return tour to the United States, General the Marquis de Lafayette spent the night at Rossborough while traveling from Baltimore to Washington. It was customary for the time for distinguished visitors to be hosted by prominent local citizens, and documents indicate that General Lafayette had been scheduled to stay with George Calvert and his family at Riversdale. Unexpected illness and human error, however, were at the center of this

change, as explained by Calvert in a letter to the editor of the *Federal Republican and Baltimore Telegraph*. The *Saturday Evening Post* described Lafayette's accommodations as "comfortable," and called the Rossborough a hotel. Lafayette himself, unfortunately, recorded nothing about his stay other than his time of arrival, at 10 p.m., and his departure the following morning.<sup>7</sup>

In the years following Lafayette's visit, the Rossborough Inn slowly declined. The Rossborough was built in the age of coach travel and toll roads; the introduction of train travel meant that coach stops such as the Rossborough quickly became outmoded. With the opening of the Baltimore-to-Washington railroad in 1832, traffic along the turnpike declined precipitously, and reports in the following years indicate that the turnpike fell into disrepair. Travelers became more concerned with the condition of the road than with the stops along it. It is around this time that the Rossborough property was converted into a tenant farm. George Calvert, the head of the Baltimore-Washington Turnpike and owner of the Rossborough, recognized the changing times and began buying farm land along the turnpike for rental purposes. Calvert placed an advertisement in a local paper in 1836 announcing that the Rossborough "Farm" was for rent. Prospective tenants inquired about the condition of the soil on the Rossborough property, which appears to have steadily declined in fertility.<sup>8</sup>

While George Calvert continued to purchase rental farms, Charles Calvert, his son, had been advised by his lawyer, Thomas Morris, that George Calvert's rental farm scheme was not a wise investment of the family's inherited wealth. In a letter dated 1830, Morris wrote to Charles that "a bad Tennent for a very few years destroyed the benefit of a life spent improving [the land] and destroys its value." Morris appears to have been right, and by 1838, the Rossborough was once again serving as an inn. When George Calvert died in 1838, his Riversdale estate and several other parcels of land were split between his two sons, Charles Benedict Calvert and George Henry Calvert.<sup>9</sup>

Sometime between 1838 and 1858, a plat was produced depicting the metes and bounds of the "Rossborough farm." While undated, clues on the plat itself help to establish a 20-year range when it must have been produced. Charles Benedict Calvert is listed as a neighbor to the parcel—land he acquired following his father's death in 1838. In addition, because the Maryland Agricultural College, which purchased the land in 1858, is not referenced, the plat was almost certainly drawn between 1838 and 1858. It is possible that it was prepared following George Calvert's death or when the property was sold to the college. Remarkably, the plat also includes detailed floor plans of the three levels of the Rossborough structure. The plans clearly reflect the function of the building as an inn complex. Multiple small rooms occupied the upper floors of the main block, the south wing, and the outbuilding, which would have accommodated overnight guests. Three substantial rooms on the first floor fit the spatial pattern for dining and gathering spaces for inns of the period. Archaeological findings confirm that the detached wing served as a kitchen as well (Figure 14). The lack of internal connections between the main block and the north wing suggests the wing was reserved as quarters for the innkeeper. All of the first floor rooms were heated by interior end fireplaces.

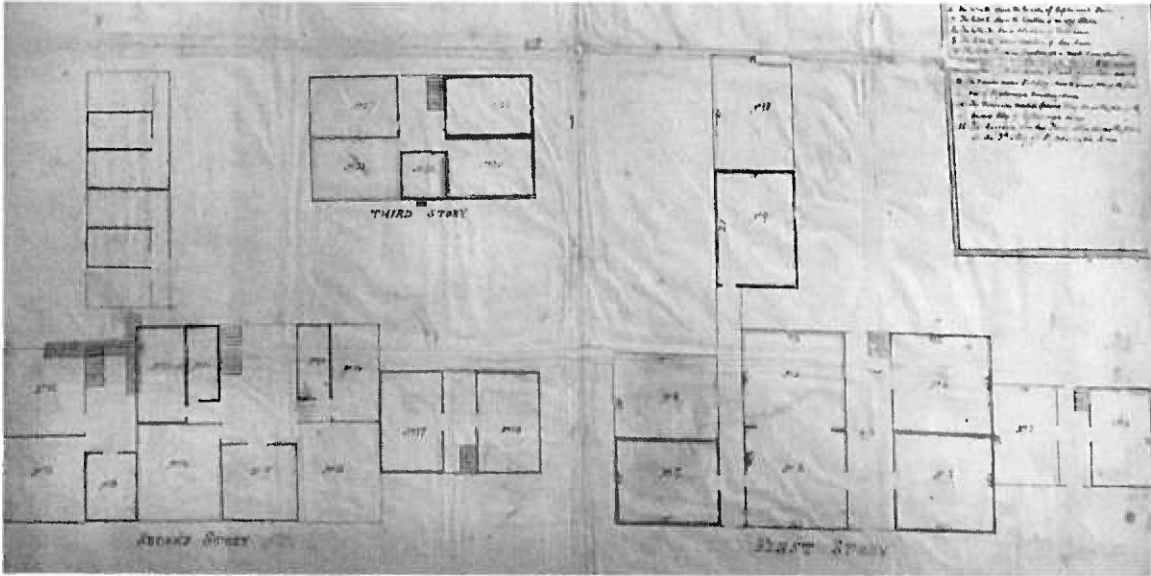


FIGURE 4. Rossborough Inn, mounted photographic copy of plat map, Anonymous, n.d. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, Department of Physical Plant records, Maps, Plans, and Drawings 1888-1987, Box 1, item 258

It appears that the wings were not conceived as original elements of the plan of the Rossborough Inn. Documents indicate that the wings were frame structures, and the archaeological excavations revealed that the brick foundations were not connected to the end walls of the main block. The earliest available photograph of the Rossborough dates to 1891, which shows the south wall of the main block after the removal of the wing. This image depicts a double window on the ground floor that aligns with the placement of an original doorway, indicating that when the wing was removed, the original door opening into the south wing was modified to fit a window. Notes from archaeological work done in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration (WPA, a federal program that funded a wide variety of projects, from infrastructure to public artworks, with the goal of putting the unemployed to work during the Great Depression) further indicate that the south wing of the structure might have featured an open, paved pass-through, presumably to provide access for coaches (Figure 5). Open-ended, paved pass-throughs are relatively common features in English coaching inns dating to the nineteenth century. In those instances, the passage led to an interior courtyard associated with the service area of the inn. Although the archaeological work also revealed brick stairs at either end of the opening in the south wing, these stairs could have been added after the inn ceased to function as a coaching inn.<sup>10</sup>

An article published in the *Baltimore Sun* on March 13, 1838, details a botched robbery at the Rossborough tavern, indicating that the building was likely once again functioning as a public house. Even though the Rossborough was back in service as an inn, its years in that capacity were numbered. By 1849, a romanticized newspaper account referred to the Rossborough's "palmy days, when the house was well kept





FIGURE 5. Rossborough Inn. Maryland Agricultural College, Anonymous, c.1901. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Maryland Photographs Buildings—Rossborough Inn, 72-297

and patronized” as long past, while it dreamily recalled the “hot blackwheat cakes, the chicken, ham and eggs, and the never-failing cup of delicious coffee, to say nothing of the numerous *et cetera* with which that gifted table abounded.”<sup>11</sup>

It is little mystery that the Rossborough’s time as an inn was at an end. Four years after the article proclaiming the Rossborough’s palmy days, a traveler wrote to Charles Calvert to inform him that the road was in such poor condition that he was thrown from his horse when one of the hooves caught a hole in the road. According to the letter, “It is a great outrage that the public should be resigned to pay tole [*sic*] over such a road.” With the inn’s lifeblood, the Eastmore-Washington Turnpike, in decline, and the railroad rendering inns antiquated and unnecessary, the sale of the Rossborough and its surrounding farmland to the newly established Maryland Agricultural College offered a new chapter in the history of the building.<sup>12</sup>

## Maryland Agricultural College

By the 1840s, agriculture in the state of Maryland was in poor condition. Tobacco farming over the previous two centuries had depleted the fertility of the soil, and farmers looked to agricultural developments in Europe as models for a new type of American institution. Chartered in 1856 and opened to its first cohort of students in 1859, the Maryland Agricultural College (MAC) sought to address the state’s agricultural woes.

In 1858, Charles Calvert sold a portion of the Riversdale estate, including the Rossborough and surrounding farm fields, to the newly formed Maryland Agricultural College, for \$20,000. Charles Calvert then went on to serve as the first president of the college from 1859 to 1860. Calvert was a strong proponent of scientific agriculture and a major influence in developing the educational focus of the college; his oversight of the institution led to Maryland (along with Pennsylvania and Michigan) becoming a pioneer in agricultural education. The Rossborough became the place to carry out this research agenda. With its associated farm and agricultural complex, the property became one of two centers of development on the fledgling campus. The other was located on a nearby hill that later became known as the “acropolis.” Development of the “acropolis” began in 1858, with the construction of the school’s barracks and first classrooms. Now the entrance of the growing MAC, the Rossborough once again became a landmark in the area.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Civil War on Campus**

Still in its infancy, the MAC was faced with attracting both students and faculty numbers, and the trustees struggled with managing the institution’s finances. During this time, “All colleges, especially young ones, relied heavily on private donations. They also relied, therefore, on a public perception of [the] college’s importance.” The college’s fortunes were imperiled even further by the arrival of the Civil War. Remarkably, in 1864, the MAC hosted the encampments of troops from the opposing sides: Union General Ambrose Burnside and his Union soldiers camped on the campus in April, while later that summer, Confederate General Jubal Early and his force camped there before leading the raid on Washington, D.C. George Callcott’s history of the university reports that faculty and students greeted the Confederate troops’ arrival at the Rossborough with enthusiasm, recounting that “College officials provided food for the soldiers, and young women appeared from the surrounding neighborhood. Fifes and fiddles came out, and partying lasted into the night.” However, college officials later denied that account of events. During the war, more faculty and students fought for the Confederacy than the Union, reflecting their overwhelmingly rural, southern backgrounds.<sup>14</sup>

In 1866, the State of Maryland purchased half of the college, bringing the private institution into the public domain. This action rescued the MAC, which had been forced to close for a year following struggles with low enrollment and the threat of bankruptcy. Unlike other colleges that struggled during this tumultuous period, MAC did not accept female students to make up the lost tuition from lower male enrollment. The college’s challenging financial situation also appears to have affected the Rossborough during this period. In 1865, the Rossborough was listed as a country boarding house for rent “with part of the furniture, if desired, on application to J. O. Wharton, Agricultural College.”<sup>15</sup>

## **Agricultural Experiment Station**

Two defining pieces of federal legislation were passed which had fundamental impacts on the role of the Rossborough in the operation of the newly formed college. The Morrill Act of 1862 established the land-grant college system. Each state was allowed to designate one college whose curricula included agriculture, technical education, and military tactics to receive funding from the sale of federal land. The MAC was selected to be Maryland's land-grant institution and received an infusion of funds. At this time, the Rossborough was converted to be the residence for the president of the MAC. The second piece of legislation with direct implications for the Rossborough was the Hatch Act of 1887. The law established agricultural experiment stations in each state and allocated \$15,000 to pay for buildings and equipment necessary for the advancement of agricultural science. Many of the stations were aligned with extant state colleges, including the Rossborough, which was selected to serve as the state's agricultural experiment station. The fertility of the farmland around the Rossborough was depleted as a result of "continuous cropping" by a series of tenant farmers, which was viewed positively by the experiment station founders since the soils would "respond quickly to applications of fertilizing materials." The Rossborough building was described in the Maryland Experiment Station's first bulletin as a two-story brick building with an annex and in need of repair.<sup>16</sup>



FIGURE 6. Two Men and an Ox Cart, Rossborough in Background, Anonymous, n.d. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, Leland Scott collection, Photographic Material 1885–1976, Box 3

The years between the Morrill Act of 1862 and the Hatch Act of 1887 were a tumultuous period for the Rossborough. Although reports indicate that the Rossborough was converted into the home of MAC's president, it was soon converted into the laundry instead. Following its stint as the college laundry, it was once again turned into a rental property. This uncertainty in the Rossborough's function and, by extension, its future, was emblematic of larger issues at the college. Local farmers became increasingly upset that the institution was not living up to the promises that had been made at its founding, and they banded together and were able to convince the federal government to withhold aid in 1876 and again in 1882.<sup>17</sup>

The Rossborough's use as the state's Agricultural Experiment Station would come to define the building for several decades. The interiors of both the main house and the back kitchen were altered in order to facilitate the needs of the station. A detailed description of the alterations was published in the station's first bulletin in 1888:

Without much change to the exterior, the main building has had a third story added, and all has been remodeled and so thoroughly repaired, at an expense of about three thousand dollars, so that very suitable and satisfactory quarters for the Station have now been provided. The rear building has been connected . . . by an enclosed gallery ten feet long.

With cheerful painted letters on the sides of the building proclaiming it to be the home of the "Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station," the Rossborough once again became a landmark for the area.<sup>18</sup>

Almost immediately, the station hosted a program of diverse experimentation, including projects aimed at increasing the potato crop yield, improving soil fertility, and testing the durability of different types of fencing. An experimental orchard was established and fields were laid out for growing fodder-corn and cane. Chemistry instructor H. J. Patterson proudly wrote of the installation of an 80-light combination gas machine for use by the chemistry laboratory that had been created on the first floor of the station.<sup>19</sup>

## **From Maryland Agricultural College to University of Maryland**

The MAC grew steadily beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century, with the experiment station becoming an integral component of campus activity. New structures on the Rossborough compound demonstrated the growing scope of research activities taking place at the experiment station. As the Rossborough grew, so, too, did other parts of campus. New academic buildings on the "acropolis" hill provided the evolving college with more space to accommodate more academic subjects. These

simultaneous expansions would provide a foundation for the college's transformation into the University of Maryland.

By 1906, the experiment station had grown into a formidable compound, including the laboratory at the Rossborough, a dairy, at least one barn, two greenhouses, and a pig pen. The experiment station compound is depicted on the 1918 Flournoy and Flournoy campus plan as consisting of at least six stand-alone structures, although the inscription indicates that these buildings were "to be removed" as part of the plan (see Figure 8). Heated by steam and lit by both gas and electric lights, the old Rossborough Inn was considered well-equipped to carry out the station's agricultural experiments. The Rossborough was also growing in profile among the students of the college. In the fall of 1891, the Rossborough Club, a social organization for the male cadets of the agricultural college, was founded and began hosting monthly dances inside the old inn. The dances soon outgrew the limited space of the Rossborough and moved elsewhere on campus, yet the club retained the moniker of the hall that inspired their name.<sup>20</sup>

While the Rossborough matured in the hearts and minds of the campus, even greater change was on the horizon. In 1912, a fire broke out during a dance in the buildings on the "acropolis" hill located west of the Rossborough. Both the barracks, the first purpose-built campus building, and the Administration Building were completely destroyed in the fire. Although several buildings survived the flames, including Science Hall (now Morrill Hall, which is often erroneously referred to as the oldest building



FIGURE 7. Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station with Livestock, Anonymous, 1924. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Maryland Photographs, 15396

on campus), the disaster ushered in a new wave of architectural change on campus. In place of the barracks and administration buildings, Calvert Hall was built in 1914 in a neoclassical style. Social changes brought new architectural changes as well. In 1916, the state took full control of the college and changed its name to the Maryland State College. Also in that year, the institution began accepting female students for the first time, and the way buildings on campus were used changed accordingly in order to separate the sexes. In 1920, Maryland State College became the University of Maryland and “The University of” was painted above “Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station” on the walls of Rossborough.<sup>21</sup>

## An Evolving Campus

When the 1912 fire destroyed the barracks and other core buildings on campus, administrators were faced with both a severe economic challenge and an opportunity to reinvent the vision of the college. From the late 1910s to the late 1920s, the campus changed drastically. Many new buildings were erected following the fire in 1912, women students were admitted in 1916, the name was changed twice, reflecting the transfer to full state control, and the academic orientation was refocused. All of these developments had wide-ranging implications for the university’s built environment. To manage these changes, the university hired architectural firm Flournoy and Flournoy in 1918 to design new buildings and create the first campus plan. Flournoy and Flournoy’s designs would be the first, but hardly the last, attempt to establish a systematic plan to govern expansion. The indecisiveness over the layout of the campus would continue through the 1930s and 1940s and finally culminate with President Byrd’s vision of a “city on a hill.”<sup>22</sup> Flournoy and Flournoy’s plan focused further development in the “acropolis” area of campus and recommended that new buildings feature a cohesive, Colonial Revival style. Flournoy and Flournoy specified that “The exterior walls [of all new buildings] are to be of dark red brick with light colored trim of stone, cement, metal or wood. . . [and] roofs generally of slate.”<sup>23</sup>

The campus developed fitfully during the 1920s in accordance with the Flournoy and Flournoy plan. Many other colleges and universities across the country were facing similar planning challenges, and scholarly works outlining planning principles for college campuses began to appear. Books such as Charles Klauder and Herbert Wise’s *College Architecture in America and Its Part in the Development of the Campus* argued for the benefits of campus plans. These works provided classifications for types of campus buildings, suggested interior layouts, and advocated for the importance of serving the needs of students and faculty in designing structures. In underscoring the importance of campus planning, Klauder and Wise argued that, “if [a university’s] architectural garb is well conceived and wrought, it will minister to the daily smooth running of student and faculty lives, it will conduce to convenience and contentment, to the financial well-being of the institution and to its standing in the educational world and before

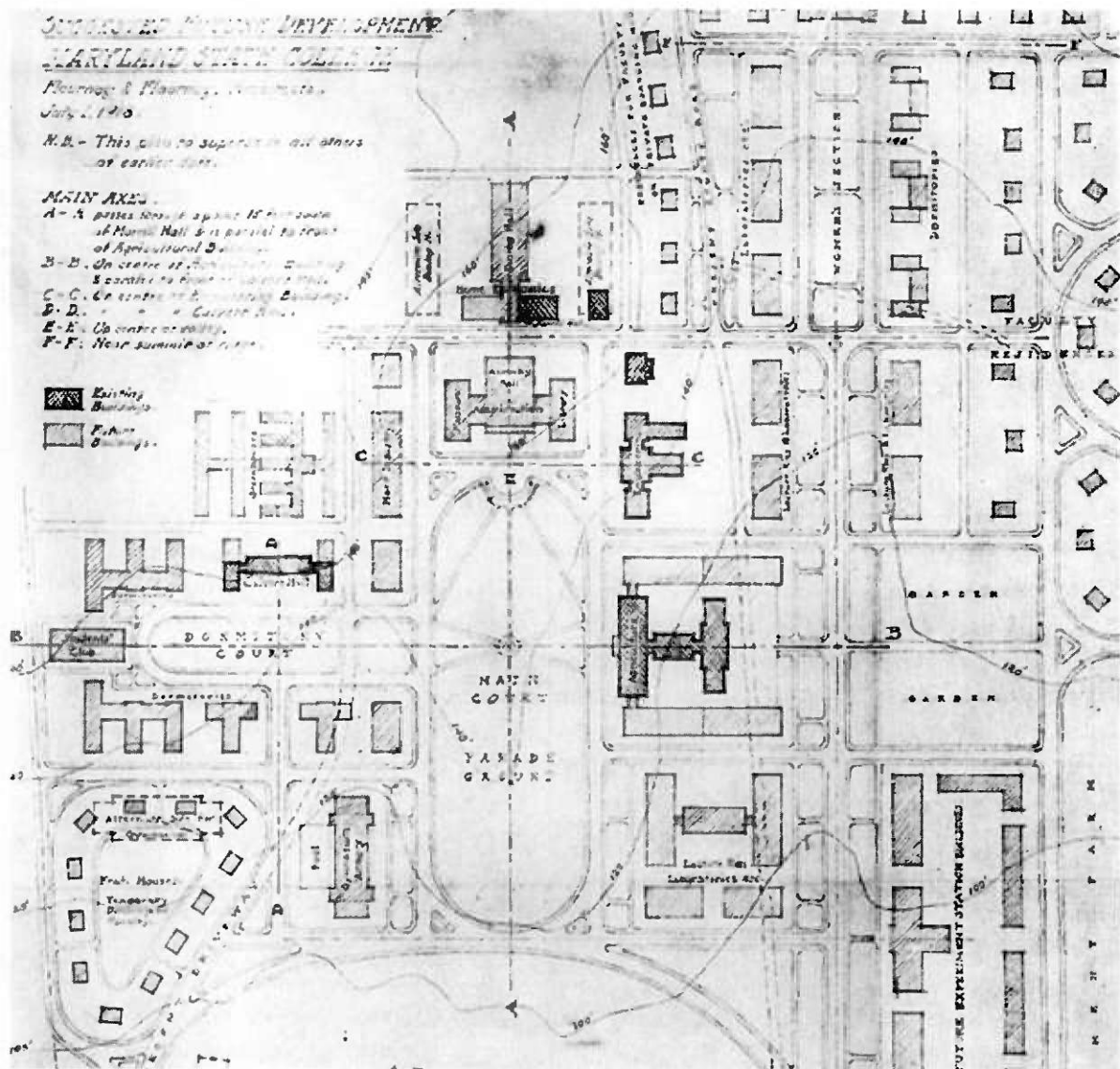


FIGURE 8. Campus Plan, Flournoy and Flournoy Architects, July 1918. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, Department of Physical Plant records, Ledger Book 1945, Mapcase 4, Drawer 1

the public; it will, in time, command the admiration of this and future generations.”<sup>24</sup>

At the same time that Klauder and Wise were advocating for campus plans, the Colonial Revival movement was sweeping America. Colonial buildings were believed to represent modernity and dignity, and Victorian-style buildings were routinely remodeled to take on “colonial” design elements beginning in the 1920s. Even buildings that actually dated to the colonial period were remodeled to reflect the current design aesthetic. The Colonial Revival movement was rooted in a nostalgia for the past during the rapid cultural transformations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>25</sup>

Between 1927 and 1931, the university contracted three more landscape architectural firms, including the Olmsted Brothers of Massachusetts, to design campus plans for College Park. All three plans recommended retaining the Rossborough building by using it to mark the end of the university’s sweeping green space that had been ad-

vocated by Flournoy and Flournoy. In every instance, however, the center of campus was re-established at the “acropolis,” leaving the Rossborough to serve as a kind of boundary. Although the landscape architects’ efforts focused largely on the academic areas of campus, the Rossborough continued to hold an important status. In a letter dated 1928, one of the contracted firms argued that “the old brick building . . . should be regarded as permanent features.” This “old brick building” was the Rossborough Inn before its renovation.<sup>26</sup>

## Creating a Cohesive Image

The campus plans developed in the 1920s and 1930s placed increased attention on developing the portion of campus near the “acropolis” hill, and during this time, the Rossborough fell out of prominence. By this time, Harry ‘Curley’ Byrd, the university’s president, was beginning to take an interest in the Rossborough. Byrd became particularly interested in returning the Rossborough to its “colonial” appearance in an attempt to return the old structure to its former glory and use it as a fitting entrance to the University of Maryland.

The Colonial Revival movement began to influence construction on the College Park campus in the 1920s. New buildings were built of masonry with white trim and other colonial details, while older buildings on campus were transformed into the colonial style. This is most evident with the Dairy Building (now Turner Hall). Situated on Baltimore Avenue near the Rossborough Inn, the Dairy Building was constructed in 1923–1924 in the International Style. By 1934, the architectural style of the building was no longer in line with the rest of campus, and the Dairy Building was summarily transformed. A brick veneer was attached to the concrete frame, windows and doorways were replaced, and fanlights, keystones, and other colonial features were added. Reviving the Dairy Building in the Colonial Revival style was the first step in presenting an “up-to-date” image of the university as viewed from Baltimore Avenue. At this time, a major campus entrance was located between the Rossborough and the Dairy Building. The appearance of the buildings at the campus entrance would set the tone for the university’s image and marked them as important. Recladding and restyling the Dairy Building to match the Rossborough enabled the university to present a cohesive, mirrored front to the world.<sup>27</sup>

The alterations to the façade of the Dairy Building complemented the architectural details of its neighbor, the Rossborough Inn. Following the 1934 renovation of the Dairy Building and prior to the 1938 renovation of Rossborough, both buildings featured parapet gables and paired interior end chimneys (see figures 10, 11, and 12). The windows on the Dairy Building were capped with jack arches with stone keystones, while at Rossborough the windows were capped by a stone keystone lintel, and both façades had fanlights and dormer windows. After the renovation of the Dairy Building, the two buildings started to emulate a different type of university. It changed from an agricultural one to a more modern liberal arts-focused institution. The transformation



was not yet complete, however, because the Rossborough Inn still represented a farm house with farm buildings.

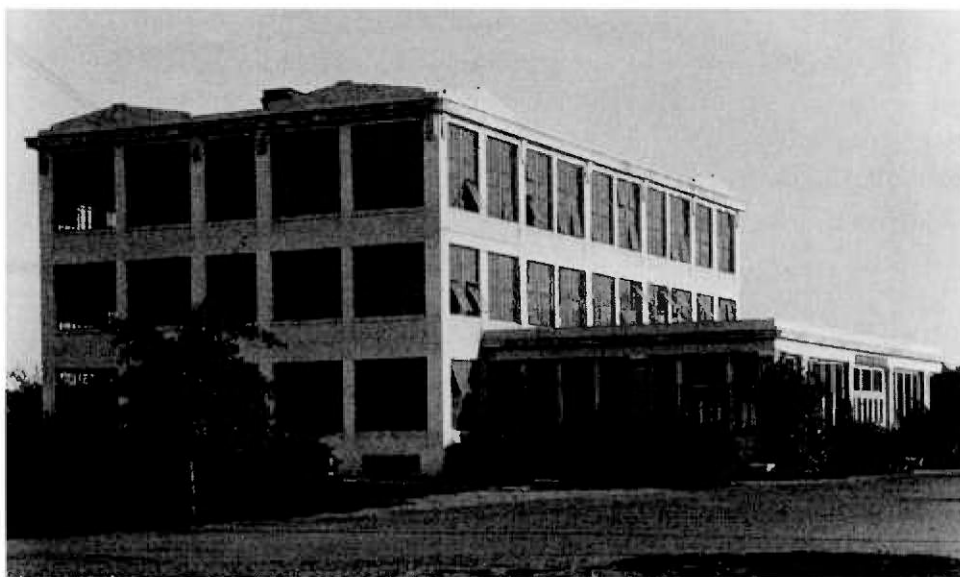


FIGURE 9. The Dairy Building before the 1934 Renovation. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Maryland Photographs, Series 4, Box 10, Folder Turner Hall, accession 1645



FIGURE 10. The Dairy Building after the 1934 Renovation. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Maryland Photographs

While the alterations to the Dairy Building were underway, the Rossborough had fallen into a state of disrepair. Charles Crisp, the Superintendent of Buildings on campus, registered his concern with the condition of the Rossborough as early as 1927, and by 1933, he was on record as stating that he no longer wanted to be responsible for it. In a letter to then-Vice President Byrd, Crisp stated that: “a renovation of the present building would leave only the exterior walls and possibly the frame work of the roof.” The poor condition of the structure in combination with the vision of a Colonial Revival-styled campus is what likely led Vice President Byrd to advocate for restoring the Rossborough to its Federal era appearance.<sup>28</sup>



FIGURE 11. The Rossborough before the 1938 Renovation, photograph by W. F. Kellerman, 1926. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, Phi Mu Fraternity records, Initiation Paper 1923–1945, Box 5, Folder 4.0

## The Rossborough Inn Renovation

Remodeling and reviving historic colonial structures remained a popular practice around the country throughout the 1930s. Beginning in the late 1920s, the restoration of Williamsburg, Virginia, as the colonial capital provided a model that was widely emulated. In 1937, the university received funding for the restoration of the Rossborough from the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Archaeological investigations were carried out in July 1938 as part of the WPA’s work on the Rossborough. These excavations helped inform aspects of the renovation,

such as the role of the west wing as a kitchen, and revealed previously unknown architectural details. These excavations help define the chronology of the Rossborough's nineteenth-century architectural changes, such as the construction and demolition of the building's south wing, as well as the dimensions of the wings. Unfortunately, priority was given to the nineteenth-century plat map in the Rossborough's renovation rather than the archaeological findings.

The scope of the work undertaken by the university and the WPA sought to address these concerns, but also to restore the Rossborough to its presumed original condition. The justification for the project was based on the Rossborough's age and historic context, and the scope of work made clear that the Rossborough should be "preserved and in order to be preserved must be repaired." Byrd argued that the funds of the University of Maryland were insufficient, and therefore requested the financial assistance from the WPA.



FIGURE 12. The walls of the Rossborough were heavily braced during the renovation, Anonymous, 1938. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, Work Projects Administration in Maryland records, 3358

The WPA was to provide seventy percent of the funds necessary for the renovation, with the university covering the remaining thirty percent. Most of the WPA funding would be in the form of labor, while the university was financially responsible for the building's interior decoration. The work to be completed during the renovation was extensive: updating the plumbing, electric, and heating, removing old plaster and paint, replacing timbers, installing a new roof, and sandblasting the exterior walls. Further, bulging and cracked walls described by Crisp in 1933 would need to be stabilized and repaired.<sup>29</sup>

The restoration work began in 1938 with Major Howard Cutler as the presiding architect. Cutler was involved with numerous campus building projects and acted as a university liaison during this time. When the project was conceived, the work was restricted to the main core of the building. However, the rediscovery of the 1830s–1850s' plat, including its diagram of the building's layout, changed these plans. Around the time that the plat was rediscovered, the archaeological investigations were underway as part of the WPA's work. Although Cutler advocated for adjusting the vision for the renovation based on the archaeological findings, Byrd overruled him and chose to organize the renovation based on the information gleaned from the plat.<sup>30</sup>

### The Rossborough Inn Renovation: The Wings

By August 1938, Cutler and Byrd were aware of the plat and its illustrations depicting north and south wings extending from the main building. Upon rediscovering the plat, university administrators elected to recreate the wings. This proved to be controversial. First, rebuilding the wings was an additional expense for which the university had not planned. Second, instead of preserving the building, it was argued that rebuilding the wings meant that the university was now reconstructing it. An official at the National Park Service (NPS) raised the alarm when he reported the change in the scope of work to the NPS and the WPA. President Byrd's response to the NPS justified their new approach by explaining that the plans they initially submitted did not include the wings because they had not known they existed. Byrd is reported to have learned about the plat from an elderly man who stopped by during work and told them of the existence of the document. The workers relocated the plat and began to excavate in the areas indicated as the former locations of the wings. They



FIGURE 13. This image shows the ghost line of the wing and the former roof line, Anonymous, 1938. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, Work Projects Administration in Maryland records, 3358

found the wings' foundation and amended their scope of work accordingly. However, this new scope of work assumed the wings were masonry, despite the fact that an 1860s' insurance document and the archaeological findings both implied that the wings were originally frame. Byrd, pleased with this turn of events, concluded: "We were, of course, delighted to get this accurate information of the Rossburg Inn as it originally existed, and the restoration is now being carried out definitely and accurately according to the original plans. It is our further purpose to restore this building, not only to its original condition, but to furnish it in the style of the 1790s period and to exhibit it as something of a show place." Byrd also claimed that they had learned that the building was called Rossborough, not Rossburg. Finally, Byrd offered that the university would produce a pamphlet to distribute at the opening of the building, and that the document would include a copy of the plat, historic photographs, and the building's history. Byrd suggested that he would send a copy of the pamphlet to the NPS for their records.<sup>31</sup>

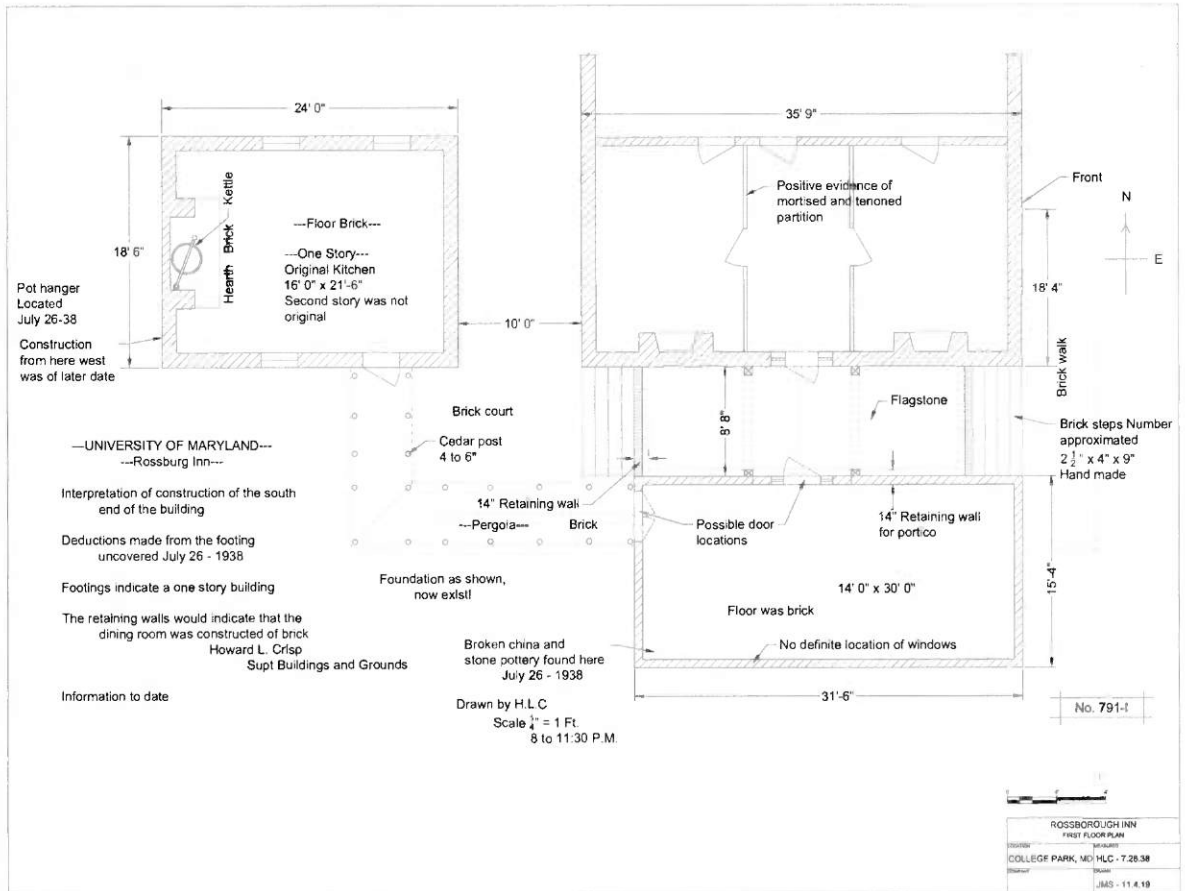


FIGURE 14. Site plan based on WPA archaeological excavations on the south wing of the Rossborough Inn, drawing by H. Cutler [redrawn by JMS], July 26, 1938 [November 14, 2019]. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, Work Projects Administration in Maryland records, 3358

## Changes to the Rossborough

The WPA renovation resulted in significant changes to the exterior and interior of the Rossborough. Before the renovation, the building lacked wings, was three stories in height, featured a mansard roof, and had a porch along the east (front) elevation. The most obvious changes made during the renovation relate to these features. During the course of the renovation, gable-roofed masonry wings were added on the north and south elevations of the building, the mansard roof was replaced by a gable roof, and the front porch was removed. Photographs taken during the renovation, together with the architect's drawings, indicate that most if not all of the original interior features were replaced; the new layout of the rooms conformed with the plat. The only major deviation from the Rossborough layout as depicted on the plat is in the south wing, which features an additional room and a wider hallway after the renovation. The majority of the surviving original fabric consists of the brick exterior walls and the fenestration of the east elevation. Original details include the stone lintels above the windows and the Coade stone keystone over the doorway, all of which were photo-documented by a University of Maryland student in 1926. However, the door was shifted several feet inward within the original opening.<sup>32</sup>

## The Rossborough Inn Interior

Decorating the interior of the Rossborough Inn became an important aspect of its renovation. Following the exterior's "return" to a colonial-era appearance, the interior renovation was likewise intended to evoke an earlier period. The decision to restore Rossborough to its presumed eighteenth-century appearance brought Byrd in contact with many historians, antique store proprietors, and other consultants. Among them was Colonial Williamsburg Inc., a commercial arm of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, which attempted to assist the university in designing and installing a proposed "historic" taproom. President Byrd was at the forefront of this and other decorative and design choices. He personally wrote to multiple consultants and played an active role in the resulting decisions. A committee for the interior furnishing of the Rossborough was eventually established. They made the recommendation to President Byrd to hire Mr. Dorsey Griffith and Mrs. Adams, historic interior specialists, to select all of the furnishings for the Rossborough, because their vision reflected "the social practices of the Inn at its most active period." Although Byrd's papers never identify her fully, Mrs. Adams likely refers to Elizabeth Stetson Adams, an interior decorator at the D.C.-based firm of Stetson & Adams. Mr. Griffith and Mrs. Adams purchased reproduction and antique items for the Rossborough with the understanding that the building would serve as a museum. Griffith and Adams selected items that reflected the Colonial Revival movement and its emphasis on order and domesticity. To secure these objects, they purchased modern and antique decorations from vendors, including United Oriental Rug Company in Baltimore, Friedman Brothers Decorative Arts Inc.

in New York City, and M. Segal & Sons Antiques in Washington, D.C. Other antiques found their own way to the Rossborough Inn, including a 1774 ladies' purse that was donated by a 15-year-old girl from Cherrydale, Virginia.<sup>33</sup>

## **The Rossborough Inn Garden**

Plants and agriculture have played a prominent though changing role throughout the Rossborough's long history, and the installation of a Colonial Revival-style garden at the Rossborough helped cement this connection today. The Rossborough Inn Garden is central to the identity of the Rossborough, and is an integral part of the building's history and significance. The garden's construction was undertaken separately from the WPA restoration of the buildings, although the opening reception for the "restored" Rossborough was put on hold until the garden was completed. Mark Shoemaker was a professor of landscape architecture in the horticulture department on campus at the time, and he was put in charge of all aspects of the garden's implementation, from landscaping design to selecting plant nurseries to choosing the specifications of the bricks for walls.

Shoemaker prepared detailed instructions for work being carried out on the Rossborough garden. He wrote a general plan, a construction detail plan, and a planting plan, all of which were to be carried out under his direct supervision as the designated landscape architect for the project. Shoemaker began touring private gardens in 1939 to select boxwood hedges for installation in the garden. He took copious notes on the sizes, conditions, and costs of the boxwoods he saw. To protect his hedges, Shoemaker requested custom-built lattices to be made to shelter the boxwoods from snow. In addition to plants, Shoemaker also designed the layout of the garden's footpaths, designed and had built a well-head for the historic well, ordered wooden benches and faux hitching posts to be installed, and designed and placed brick walls to add privacy and exclusivity to the space.<sup>34</sup>

A copy of Shoemaker's original planting plan for the garden could not be located, but photographs from the Rossborough's opening reception in 1940 provide an indication of what the garden was intended to look like (see Figure 15). Although Shoemaker spent several thousand dollars making his vision for the Rossborough Garden a reality, only three of the original fifty species of plants on Shoemaker's planting list are known to remain. Additionally, sometime after 1998, bluestone was used to pave over the grass located between the brick pathways in the garden, further altering the garden's appearance from Shoemaker's 1939 vision.<sup>35</sup>

## **Grand Opening: May 30, 1940**

As late as 1939, the Rossborough had no intended function beyond use as a "show place." However, by the time of its grand opening on May 30, 1940, the Rossborough had been established as a tearoom and museum with an event space. University

dignitaries, including President Byrd, Adele Stamp, and Mark Shoemaker, as well as members of historical interest groups, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, attended the opening.



FIGURE 15. The Rossborough Garden during the Grand Opening, photograph by Mark Shoemaker, May 30, 1940. University of Maryland, Special Collections and University Archives, Mark Shoemaker papers, Photographs 1926–1971, series 5

As President Byrd had promised, the university produced a publication on the history of the Rossborough to coincide with the grand opening. In addition to a brief history of Rossborough, the pamphlet featured a copy of the plat and historic photographs. The pamphlet also claimed that the current floor plan matched the historic floor plan exactly, except that some small bedrooms had been turned into bathrooms or closets.<sup>36</sup>

### **Campus Planning and Expansion in the 1940s**

By the time the newly refurbished Rossborough was dedicated, the university was evolving quickly. A six-year expansion plan for the College Park, Baltimore, and Princess Anne campuses of the university had been launched in 1939, and by 1941, Byrd had already built ten new buildings in College Park and removed the road between the Rossborough Inn and the Dairy Building. In 1941, he proposed the construction of ten additional buildings. The symbolic crown of this construction was the creation of a cultural landscape at the university's pedestrian entrance.<sup>37</sup>



Until 1939, the location of new buildings on campus had adhered to the 1927 vision of Olmsted and Simonds & West. The Morrill Quad as well as the valley to the southeast of it, now known as the Chapel Lawn, had been preserved. However, the 1927 plan was forcing the university to expand in new directions, and by the late 1930s, a new quad, now known as McKeldin Mall, was beginning to take shape. This development reflected a significant reorganization of the layout of the campus, one which would eventually solidify the university's identity as a state flagship institution and put distance between itself and its history as an agricultural college.<sup>38</sup>

The removal of the road between the Rossborough and the Dairy Building helped strengthen that vision and created a modern pedestrian entrance to the university. The Rossborough's farm structures and outbuildings had been removed in 1938 prior to the restoration, and the Dairy Building had been re-clad in 1934. Once the road was removed, a new pedestrian entrance was created, one that was no longer grounded in the school's agricultural history. To reinforce this modern image and help connect the Rossborough and the Dairy Building into an idyllic designed space, the Class of 1910 Gate and brick walls (both erected in 1941) were installed. Together, the gate and the two buildings established a terminus for the new McKeldin Mall. This cultural landscape would have provided an aesthetically cohesive and welcoming front to the world. When viewing the university grounds from Baltimore Avenue, a visitor would see the paired Colonial Revival-style buildings with their brick walls and wrought iron gate directly in front of them with an expansive grass mall leading to Anne Arundel Hall on top of the hill overlooking the area. This would have been a dramatic perspective that invited visitors while underscoring the legitimacy and power of the modern academy. While Byrd's vision of the Rossborough as a gate to the university was being realized, however, he still had to identify a fitting function for the structure.

## **Museum**

In June 1940, President Harry Byrd told the Maryland State Council of Homemakers Clubs that he anticipated that the Rossborough Inn would be used as a museum and show place. What he failed to mention was that, by the summer of 1940, the museum was already complete: the administration had already solicited, reviewed, recruited, and paid an outside consulting team to select the furnishings for the Rossborough, had purchased over \$15,000 in antiques alone, had borrowed or received as a donation an unknown quantity of additional antiques from as far away as California, and had made clear in an operations policy document about the Rossborough that the second floor of the building was intended to be used as a museum.<sup>39</sup>

In May 1940, the state comptroller wrote to Byrd suggesting that Byrd take out insurance on the antiques in the Rossborough. This required an inventory and valuation of each piece kept there. Griffith's inventory of the Rossborough revealed an assessed value of the collection totaling \$15,177.60. In addition to listing the antiques, the

inventory also provides an insight into the layout and placement of the furnishings.<sup>40</sup>

Although Byrd, Dorsey Griffith, and Mrs. Adams devoted extensive time and money to outfitting the Rossborough with hundreds of antiques, the Rossborough's role as a museum appears to have been short-lived. In a 1947 article from the *University of Maryland Alumni Publication*, a student discussed touring the storage room in the Arts and Science building that housed the antiques from the Rossborough Inn. While it is impossible to tell whether all of the items from the Rossborough were in storage or only a select few, the article specifically mentions several items listed on Dorsey and Adams' inventory. The final reference to the Rossborough Inn museum antiques comes from a series of communications between the state comptroller and President Byrd in which it is revealed that \$5,151.05 in antiques had been stolen.<sup>41</sup>

## Inn and Faculty Club

Long before plans to restore the Rossborough were set in motion, faculty at the university had appealed for the creation of a designated faculty club. A letter from a professor in the Modern Languages Department requested that Byrd consider turning the Rossborough into a faculty club in December 1938—shortly after the renovation had begun. Interest in a University of Maryland faculty club might have been sparked by the construction of a brand new facility at Johns Hopkins University in 1937.<sup>42</sup>

Investigating the viability of this request, Byrd directed university deans to survey their faculty to measure interest in the Rossborough as a dinner restaurant. Replies to Byrd's query revealed high levels of interest, especially for a high-class eating place in College Park with fare that would be as good as that available in Washington, D.C. Additionally, the faculty expressed the desire to be able to reserve the restaurant for private dinners. Although Byrd's informal survey indicated that a majority of faculty were interested in a dinner service at the Rossborough, those plans were not implemented until the late 1960s.

Throughout much of 1939 and early 1940, there was no consensus on the Rossborough's function—including in remarks made by Byrd himself. In June 1940, Byrd informed the Maryland State Council of Homemakers Clubs that they could not use the Rossborough as their headquarters because it would be a museum and show place. However, in that same month, an article in the *Evening Star* stated that the Rossborough would serve as a "faculty-alumni club with recreation and reception rooms, a private dining hall, a large meeting room and eight bedrooms for alumni and guests at special functions at the university." Yet another article, this one published in the *Baltimore Sun* in May 1940, stated that "The main building will serve as a combined museum and faculty-alumni center, and the rear ell, containing a large dining room and kitchen, will be converted into a faculty tearoom." While the newspapers and private correspondences disagreed on what functions the Rossborough would serve, Byrd himself moved forward with plans for an inn and a lunch restaurant.

In May 1940, Byrd's instructions called for hiring two people—one to operate the inn and one to act as hostess for the "dining room or cafeteria." According to this plan, Byrd also intended on using the middle portion of the main building as a museum and occasional meeting space. The wings were to serve as lounges and conference rooms for faculty and alumni. The basement was to house recreation rooms for faculty. In the west annex, the second floor was to be a museum while the first floor was to host a dining hall. Byrd recommended implementing a membership fee for faculty and alumni who expected to use the inn as a club and declared that the Rossborough would only be used for functions connected to the "official life of the University." These plans put the Rossborough on a steady course to becoming an unofficial faculty club.

Although Byrd's plans for the Rossborough had created an informal faculty club, individuals at the university continued to press for more official status. For the entirety of Byrd's presidency, he refused to grant the request for an official club. That changed in 1954, when Dr. Thomas B. Symons, acting president of the university following Byrd's retirement, granted the faculty's request. Once the faculty club officially opened, the use of space within the Rossborough changed: the central portion of the Rossborough was converted into an inn while the west annex became a restaurant focused on lunch service and catering. Chairs and tables were available for dining in the garden during this time.<sup>43</sup>

The new faculty club immediately began to receive positive press. One article stated that the Rossborough was the perfect place for a faculty club because it was known for its "spacious, quiet rooms, its formal herb garden, magnificent elm trees," and that it made "an ideal academic retreat, be it for a cup of coffee, a hot lunch, or a place just to come to and rest."<sup>44</sup>

The Rossborough Inn Faculty Club opened for guests on January 1, 1955, and continued to operate as a hotel until 1968. The hotel featured five regular rooms, which consisted of the five standard rooms on the second floor and three emergency lodging rooms located on the third floor. When the inn opened, room rates were \$4.00 per day for single and \$7.00 per day for double occupancy. The inn was managed by H. Douglas Wilson, and Mr. Wilson and his wife, Alice Henych Wilson, lived in the north wing of the Rossborough. When the inn closed in March 1968, 2,600 lines had been used in the hotel registration book, encompassing an estimated 3,500 guests. No reason was given for why the inn was closed.<sup>45</sup>

When the inn closed, the use of space in the Rossborough changed once again. The main block of the Rossborough became a formal restaurant with private dining rooms on the second floor. The west annex became an informal restaurant with a sandwich line. The north wing, which had previously housed the inn keeper and his family, now became the residence of the restaurant's manager.

The faculty club hosted many social events at the Rossborough Inn, including wedding receptions, retirement parties, college receptions, and other gatherings, oftentimes renting out the garden for private functions. Many famous and influential people ate at the Rossborough, including the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, NCAA football coaches,

William “Brit” Kirwan, Chancellor of the Maryland university system, and members of President Jimmy Carter’s cabinet. The faculty club was used for meals, conferences, happy hours, and catered parties in the late 1970s. Sometime during the 1970s, however, the Rossborough began to expand its reach into other profit-generating activities. For example, in the late 1970s, the third floor of the Rossborough was used as student housing, and by the 1990s, the Rossborough was hosting exclusive dinner functions. Food service at the Rossborough was ended in 2003.<sup>46</sup>

## **Alumni Office**

The Rossborough has had a tangential relationship with the university’s alumni organization throughout its long history as a campus institution. As early as 1939, over a year before the renovation would be completed, the alumni association dedicated the Rossborough to “the spirit and traditions of University of Maryland graduates” as part of the 1939 alumni day activities. The following year, President Byrd stated that the alumni had requested that the Rossborough serve as the headquarters for the alumni association. It would take almost fifty years before that request would be granted.<sup>47</sup>

In 1988, the Maryland Legislature created the Maryland Higher Education Commission to restructure the public universities in the state. As part of this restructuring, the first official alumni association dedicated solely to the University of Maryland, College Park was founded. On May 2, 1989, following their official chartering, the association moved their offices to the north wing of the Rossborough. Leonard Raley served as the first director of the alumni association from 1989 until 1994, when Joan Patterson took over the directorship. She served as director from 1994 until 1999. Sometime after 1999, the alumni association offices moved to an office building on Baltimore Avenue, before they were finally relocated in 2006 to the newly built Samuel Riggs Alumni Center.<sup>48</sup>

## **Social Importance Post-1941**

Although the Rossborough’s role as a social gathering spot for university students and faculty had largely waned in the decade following the building’s renovation, its use as a place for non-university-related functions grew exponentially. From garden clubs to national fraternities to alumni gatherings for other colleges, the Rossborough served as a center of activity for the greater College Park community during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The Rossborough Garden established its own social importance, too. In 1998, the garden was dedicated to the memory of free and enslaved African Americans “who have constructed, educated, served and contributed to the University of Maryland.” A plaque commemorating the dedication was placed on one of the garden’s brick entrance walls and can still be seen today.

## Conclusion

The Rossborough Inn has stood on Baltimore Avenue for over two centuries, where it witnessed the birth of the college and its subsequent rebrandings and rebuildings.



FIGURE 16. A staged photo from 1950 in the Rossborough garden, Anonymous, 1950. University of Maryland, the *Terrapin* [College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 1950], 22–23

Although the building is associated with the university today, our research has demonstrated the long and varied history of the Rossborough before the university's founding. The Rossborough's associations with the Calvert family, with General the Marquis de Lafayette, and the evolution of travel in the Eastern United States illuminates the humble building's role in the broader story of America.

The ebb and flow of the Rossborough within the research and social lives of the university also attest to the evolving identity of the school since its founding. From agricultural experiment station to president's home to college laundry to home of the alumni association, the Rossborough Inn has continually served where it has been needed most. The recognition of the Rossborough as a major campus and historical landmark was underscored by the dramatic efforts of President Harry Byrd and the WPA to save it from collapse. As well as preserving the physical structure of the building, these efforts worked to elevate the Rossborough as a major campus landmark through the

creation of the formal entrance landscape. As a key feature in the university's face to the world, the Rossborough continues to welcome passersby, just as it has done since its time as an inn in the 1800s.

Although the Rossborough has gradually faded from campus consciousness and today serves as office space, it continues to be a powerful memory for those who dined and worked in its halls during the 1970s, '80s, and '90s. New developments on campus, such as the construction of the Purple Line metro corridor, and along Baltimore Avenue present both challenges to and opportunities for the Rossborough Inn to resume its status as a major focal point for the campus. With its central location along Baltimore Avenue, the Rossborough offers a chance to celebrate and reflect on the history of the university and the history of College Park as the campus continues to embrace modernization and progress.

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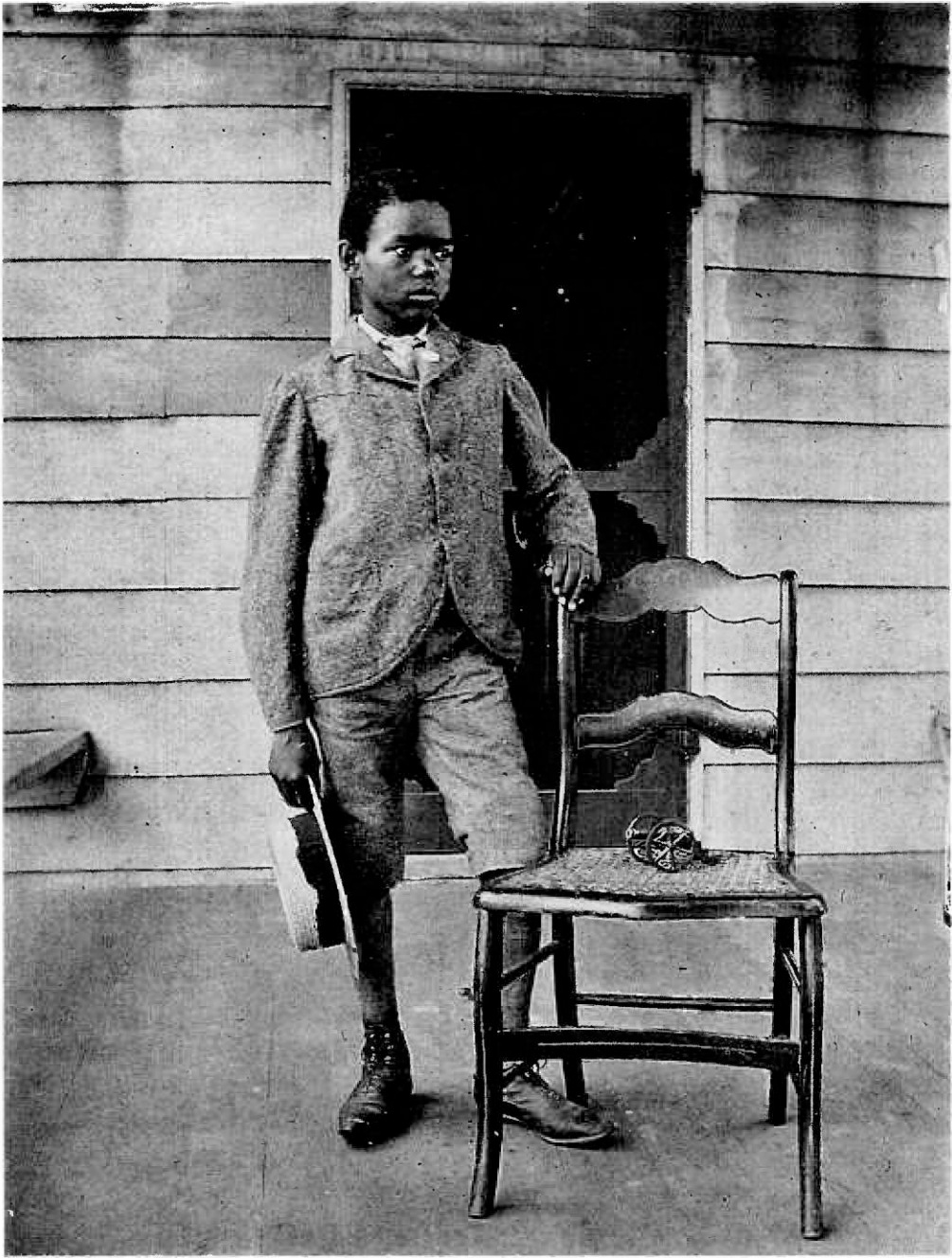


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48. Donna Fraley, personal communication, November 3, 2016.



This photograph is most likely of Lewis Roberts, the eleven-year-old son of Horace Roberts, a farm hand on the Clara Dorsey Farm.

Note: all images accompanying this article are owned by the Willis family and used with permission. They were discovered by James Dawson and initially published in his edited version of the Willis diaries, *100 Years of Change on the Eastern Shore: The Willis Family Journals, 1847-1951* (n.p.: published by Charles F. Willis III, 2014), on pages 261, 56, 99, and two unnumbered pages, respectively. The images are described as "informal snapshots taken by anonymous family members or friends at the Willis' Clara Dorsey farm, most likely between 1890 and 1901." Any supplementary information in the captions used for potential identification of the subjects was garnered by the author from the 1900 U.S. Census data, as cited in the endnotes.

# A Certain Kind of Freedom: Black Agency in Talbot County, 1870–1910

WILLIAM F. MESSNER

**H**ISTORIANS HAVE PORTRAYED the late nineteenth century on Maryland's Eastern Shore as a period of stasis for black Americans. Many claim that after an initial burst of progress immediately following the Civil War, conditions for African Americans regressed to a situation not far removed from that of the antebellum period. The most recent study of this period in the region's history argues that the isolation of the area served as a primary obstacle to improvements in race relations and that by the dawn of the twentieth century "the opportunity for meaningful reform in matters of race had briefly come, and now was gone." Often viewed as the Eastern Shore's epicenter, Talbot County epitomized this doleful situation. Dickson Preston, the county's most prolific chronicler, contends that conditions for blacks barely improved in the postwar era, with whites treating African Americans as little more than serfs.<sup>1</sup>

While the above portrayals contain much truth, they reflect only one dimension of black lives in Talbot County, and obscure other aspects of the era that have salience for the region and its black population. In a multitude of ways, life for ordinary blacks in Talbot County changed significantly during this period, demonstrating what has been labeled "a remarkable 'thickening' of African-American civic and associational life." Over the course of these four decades, blacks succeeded in creating for themselves new lives apart from whites, and black agency existed as a counterpoint to black subordination in Talbot County.<sup>2</sup>

The most obvious and immediate example of blacks taking control over their lives after the state's emancipation of its slave population in late 1864 was their widespread effort to place as much distance as possible between themselves and whites with whom they had formerly interacted. Many blacks from Talbot County joined the exodus of individuals to large urban areas, especially Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, where

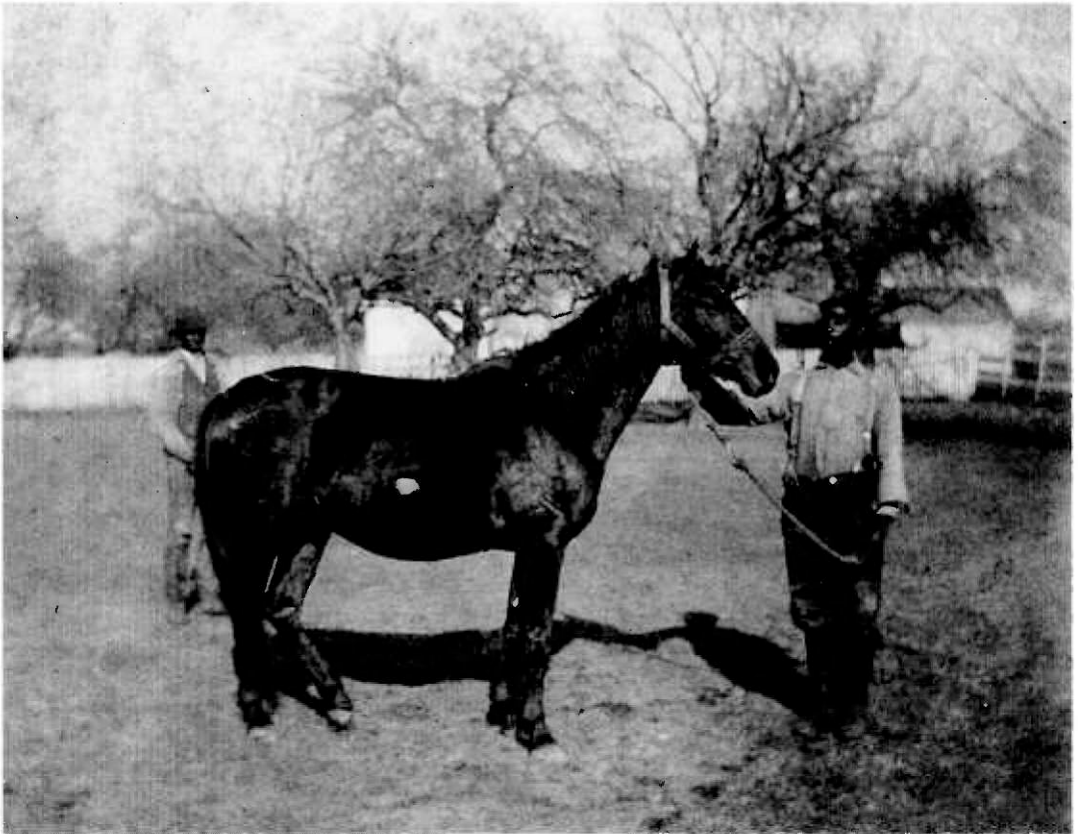
William F. Messner received his doctorate in history from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He served as president of several higher education institutions and is the author of a number of articles and a monograph dealing with federal policy regarding freedmen during and after the Civil War, *Freedmen and the Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana, 1862–1865*.

jobs were hopefully more plentiful and isolation from whites was more achievable. Suggestive of the beginnings of this trend is the fact that the county's black population remained static between 1860 and 1870 despite an overall growth in Talbot's population of nine percent. By 1910, while Talbot County's total population grew by twenty-two percent, the number of African Americans declined by eight percent, with their overall percentage of the county's population shrinking steadily from thirty-eight percent in 1880 to thirty-six percent in 1900 to thirty-four percent in 1910.<sup>3</sup>

Although some blacks sought the security of urban areas outside of Talbot County, others joined together to establish residential clusters within the county apart from white individuals. The best known and largest of these black hamlets was Unionville, a town originally settled after the Civil War by black army veterans, which grew by the end of the century to around 250 individuals. But a variety of lesser known black towns also came into existence during this period, some of which, like Unionville, have persisted into the twenty-first century. Among these were Copperville, established in close conjunction with Unionville on the Miles River Neck, and Bellevue, which late in the nineteenth century evolved into an all-black town of watermen and packing-house workers. Additionally, several other hamlets that had developed prior to the Civil War as the result of white efforts at segregating blacks, such as Hole-in-the-Wall and Ivytown, persisted through the latter part of the nineteenth century, as did the largely black Hill neighborhood of Easton.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond the impulse to separate themselves from whites, a primary factor motivating Talbot blacks to seek more isolated and less developed sections of the county was the desire to own their homes and work their own land, a feat especially difficult in white-dominated areas due to expense and white hostility. The black desire for their own homes and land had been evident prior to the war among free blacks, who by 1860 comprised almost half of the county's African American population. After the war, despite economic hardship and white hostility to black property ownership, the desire for land among African Americans gained even more impetus. In the town of Easton, home to the county's largest black population, thirty-seven percent of African American heads of households owned their homes in 1900 as compared to thirty-six percent of white heads of households. In the town of Trappe, which contained the county's second largest black population, a similar percentage of blacks owned their homes although a larger percentage of whites (sixty-six percent) did as well. Black land ownership apart from homes was particularly evident in Trappe. Of the eighty-seven black homeowners in the Trappe area, fifty-four (sixty-two percent) farmed land that they owned. In 1910, seventy-two percent of black farm operators in Talbot County owned their farms, with the majority of these farms being mortgage-free. In the same year, thirty percent of all Talbot County black families lived in homes that they owned, with seventy percent of these residences free of any mortgage. While the value of black homes and farms was less than that of their white counterparts' properties, ownership of property provided African American families with a modicum of security amidst a generally discouraging agricultural environment.<sup>5</sup>

Although some blacks in Talbot County were successful in obtaining their own homes and farms, the majority continued to work as hired laborers, at times on the same farms where they had worked as slaves. While this situation could be viewed as merely an extension of slave labor, a closer look suggests that black workers in the late nineteenth century had a degree of autonomy available to them unknown even to free blacks prior to the Civil War. The *Easton Gazette*, the county's leading Republican newspaper, critically commented on this situation at the turn of the century. "Every farmer and trucker knows how hard it is to get workmen. In the tidewater section men prefer the work in the water to that on the land. They claim it is more remunerative and more independent. Negro labor was once the very best for the fields. It is no longer so. Everyone of us knows how unreliable and how utterly indifferent it has become. The negroes crowd into the towns, where the men do odd jobs, and the women take in washing or keep restaurants." As the *Gazette* perceptively observed, blacks who sought a living apart from agricultural work, especially as oystermen, did so as much out of a desire to work free from the control of whites as for the sake of financial rewards.<sup>6</sup>



A Willis horse being shown by farm hands Billie Green and Horace Roberts. Horace Roberts is listed in the 1900 Census as a Willis neighbor and farm laborer. In 1891, at age seventeen, Roberts began to work for the Willises for the sum of \$10 per month. Billie Green is most likely Alex Green, listed in the 1900 Census as a nineteen-year-old servant living on the Willis farm.

Soon after emancipation, Talbot farmers began complaining of labor shortages and the unreliability of black workers. The *Easton Star Democrat* in 1871 asserted that “the negroes . . . have too much of politics in their heads to be of much service to the farmers. . . . It is certainly an aggravation when a farmer is engaged in harvesting . . . to have all his hands off to attend a ‘black meeting,’ or . . . to attend a political gathering.” A decade later the situation for employers had deteriorated further, as the advent of packing houses and oyster cultivation in Talbot County increased the demand for labor and provided blacks with work options previously unavailable to them. “The colored people,” declared the *Trappe Enterprise*, “who work on farms leave about the 1st of October, when farm work is urgent, and find employment either in the oyster houses or up on some of the many oyster boats that throng the water districts of the county.” The state’s Bureau of Industrial Statistics echoed the newspaper’s analysis, observing that “the demand for labor in the oyster season very often exceeds the supply, as the higher compensation in the oyster industry tempts the best hands to desert the farm.” But even in the packing industry, employers complained of black workers’ freedom to determine their own work patterns. The *Easton Gazette* noted in 1899 that “the employment of colored labor has its drawbacks. . . . This week a picnic was held near town, and Mr. Wrightson with a great quantity of tomatoes on hand, had to shut down . . . while other factories were crippled to a considerable extent.”<sup>7</sup>

The journals of Nicholas Willis and his son Charles Willis, owners of the Clora Dorsey Farm on Island Creek Neck outside the village of Trappe, provide a micro-level view of this new black labor dynamic. Nicholas Willis had worked the 130-acre farm prior to the Civil War with a mixed labor force of thirteen slaves and several free black workers. As early as 1871 he began to record his discontent with the independence his black laborers now demonstrated. “Washington [Washington Trippe, Willis’s former slave] and I had some words this morn and I told him he had better leave. He would not tye up or shock my blade fodder after sun set, nor begin work before sun rise. I told him he was an old scamp . . . to tell me he wouldn’t work after sun down.”<sup>8</sup>

The Willis’ unhappiness with the independence demonstrated by their black workers grew over the next several decades. In 1874 Nicholas wrote that “Tom is absent. I think he has quit to go harvesting and left me to do as I can.” Eight years later he complained, “We had a great deal of difficulty with the hands on acct of wages. . . . Five hands from Dorchester refused to work for less than \$1.25 per day, and we did not get running before 10:00 A.M.” In 1902, Willis’s son Charles recorded, “There are quite enough negro men idle to supply the demand for labor in saving the corn crop, but they will not work more than a day or two in a week. We have to pay one dollar . . . a day and board generally, and some farmers are paying \$1.50 and board. . . . We are going through another reconstruction period with the negro as a paid laborer, and I think this period worse than the first, because now when a negro quits work for one there is not another to take the place.”<sup>9</sup>

Black efforts to establish their own work patterns suggest that, after years of enforced labor, they now had the latitude to determine their own priorities regarding how they





Willis household members Kate Willis, sister of Charles Sr., “Aunt Ann” Smith Banton, Charles Willis Sr., and a young helper. Given the fact that Nicholas Willis is not present in this family photograph, the image might have been taken in the period between his death in February 1899 and Ann’s death in October 1901.

lived their lives and allocated their time. The Willis’ diary gives eloquent expression to white frustration with this development. “Hands kept holy day,” Nicholas exclaimed acidly in his journal on November 1, 1875, as his black workers abandoned their labors to attend a celebration in Trappe for the anniversary of Maryland’s end of slavery. A year later, he wrote again, “Daniel, John and Ned took holy day, Emancipation Day.” And on November 1, 1879, he reported, “No work by the colored people.” Willis and his son Charles annually repeated this refrain throughout the next several decades, with Charles lamenting in 1900 that Trappe was the only district in the state where blacks celebrated November 1 as Emancipation Day. Charles was in error. By 1900 Emancipation Day had become a general holiday among African Americans in Talbot County, with celebrations held in Easton, St. Michaels, and Unionville in addition to Trappe.<sup>10</sup>

Within this picture of shifting labor dynamics, the place of black women merits particular attention. An examination of the 1900 federal census for the town of Easton provides insight into the forces of continuity and change that impacted female workers. Most obviously, black women continued to occupy the lowest rungs on the employment ladder. The majority of employed black women (seventy percent) worked as house servants for white families, while another twenty-three percent worked as washerwomen doing the laundry for white households. Only a literal handful of black Easton women worked in skilled occupations such as schoolteacher, nurse, and midwife. While black

women had provided domestic service for white families before the Civil War, two important changes can be noted after the war years. First, a majority of black domestics in Easton were living outside of their employers' homes, thereby reducing the ability of whites to have constant oversight of their servants' labors. Secondly, the large number of black laundresses, who operated as independent entrepreneurs and accomplished their work within their own homes, is an indication that this mode of employment was, as one historian has noted, "the optimal choice for a black woman who wanted to create a life of her own." The majority of Easton washerwomen were married or widowed with children, best exemplified by Sallie Dobson and Josephine Gibson with fifteen and sixteen children respectively, who were able to combine washing with childcare while receiving help from other family members. But even single black women with no childcare responsibilities, such as Mary Smith and Ida Collins, engaged in this line of work that at least allowed them to labor as independent workers outside of the gaze and control of whites.<sup>11</sup>

It is also noteworthy that employed female workers represented only forty-three percent of the 342 adult black women in Easton at the turn of the century. Even allowing for the fact that a number of adult black women were either too old or burdened with childcare responsibilities to be employed, the census numbers are indicative of a changing labor dynamic for a growing number of black women. The large number of unemployed black women below the age of fifty with few, if any, children to care for



Formerly enslaved Mary Tillie and Alverta doing laundry at the Clora Dorsey farmhands' cottage. Mary is most likely Mary Roberts, wife of Horace Roberts.

suggests that at least some black women were emulating the white homemaker model that was ubiquitous in Easton at the turn of the century. The 1900 census for Easton lists not one employed married white woman. Other black women may have been exercising what one historian has identified as their primary strategy for asserting their economic independence—leaving employment, at least temporarily, by quitting their jobs. The *Easton Ledger* described this tendency among black women. “House servants in Easton at this time are like the Frenchman’s flea—when you put your fingers on them they are not there. They may get breakfast, dinner or supper, and when the lady of the house goes to give out the next meal, the servant is likely to be at one of the packing houses paring peaches, as in the kitchen.”<sup>12</sup>

The highest priority evinced by both male and female African Americans in the years following the Civil War was the acquisition of an education for themselves and their children. While Northern philanthropic organizations, and later the state, initiated educational efforts for blacks in Talbot County, none of these efforts could have succeeded without the enthusiastic embrace of the black population. Among the first philanthropic organizations to initiate an educational outreach to Talbot blacks was the Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Col-



“Aunt Ann” Smith Bantom at the Clora Dorsey Farm. Ann, whose full name was Mary Ann Smith Bantom (c.1816–1901), was formerly enslaved by Nicholas Willis. After the Civil War, she worked as a servant for the Willis family and remained on good terms with them. In 1891, Nicholas helped her make out her will, and in 1899 she visited him on his deathbed. James Dawson, ed., *100 Years Of Change On The Eastern Shore* (2014), xviii, 179, 200.

ored People, which established schools in Trappe, St. Michaels, and Easton in 1865. Shortly thereafter the Hartford Freedmen's Aid Society established a school in Royal Oak. Although these activities met with a hostile reception at times from local whites, students and teachers persisted in their educational efforts aided by financial support from the local black community and freedmen's aid societies. In August of 1867 Rebecca Primus, a black teacher from Connecticut, reported that her school in Royal Oak had grown from ten students to seventy-five in a year and a half, as well as having a Sunday school with fifty students. Initially housed in makeshift structures, the school would move to a newly built schoolhouse paid for by donations amounting to \$400, half of which was raised among local blacks. Of her students, Primus reported that "they are industrious & hopeful of the future, their interest in school unabated & many of them deny themselves in order to sustain it."<sup>13</sup>

By 1872 the Maryland State Legislature approved legislation calling for the establishment of public schools for black children, separately from those for white children. White support for black public education was far from unanimous, but the success of private philanthropic educational efforts had demonstrated African American enthusiasm for education. Additionally, as articulated by the *Easton Gazette*, some whites believed that public education would have a civilizing effect on blacks: "The more intelligent the negro becomes, the more he sees his dependence upon the republic that made his advancement possible, and the more he respects and treats with deference the dominant race, and the less boisterous, clamorous and abusive he becomes."<sup>14</sup>

While white support for black education had, at best, a clearly paternalistic tone, blacks perceived education as one of the few opportunities available to them for advancement, and enthusiastically embraced it during the late nineteenth century. Enrollment of black students in Talbot County grew steadily from 1,074 in 1878 to 1,810 in 1899, spread over twenty schools scattered throughout the county. The largest of the black schools was located in Easton with an enrollment of 224 students, followed by Oxford, St. Michaels, and Royal Oak. The *Easton Gazette* termed the growth in black students "phenomenal," and further suggested that the state appropriation for black schools was woefully inadequate. State funding for Talbot County schools in 1897 was \$42,869, fifteen percent of which the state allocated for black schools despite black enrollment comprising thirty-seven percent of the total student population. Additionally, black public schools were limited to an eight-month school year compared to nine months for white schools; teachers in black schools were paid substantially less than their white counterparts; school buildings and supplies available to black students were decidedly inferior to those supplied to white students; and in at least one case the state required the black community to purchase land as a prerequisite for the building of a school for African American children.<sup>15</sup>

To surmount these obstacles, the African American community in Talbot County brought to bear its own resources to foster education for its youth. As noted earlier, blacks contributed both money and sweat equity to the establishment of schools sponsored by freedmen's aid societies early in the postwar period. Throughout the remainder of

the century, the black community continued to advocate for enhanced educational opportunities. In 1882, blacks from Oxford and Copperville presented the Talbot County School Board with petitions to replace their outmoded educational facilities with new buildings, to no avail. In the town of Trappe, Nathan “Nace” Hopkins, a former slave, led a successful effort to have schools built by the state for black children, and even secured land on which a black school was established. In 1899, a convention of the county’s black citizens gathered to agitate for the establishment of an industrial school for their youth, arguing that “education is the only real and permanent solution of the race problem.” The gathering pledged financial support for an industrial school that it hoped would accomplish “a marrying of mental disciplines and manual dexterity for black youth,” and which the *Easton Gazette* argued “would educate the worthy colored man who knows his station and tries his utmost to fill it.”<sup>16</sup>

A leading black voice in the effort toward educational advancement for Talbot County blacks was Malachi Rasin, principal of the Easton Colored School and Methodist minister who would spend a long career serving black congregations throughout Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey. Rasin emphasized practical education for black youth along with a stress on moral improvement, a message that dovetailed nicely with the paternalistic outlook that permeated Talbot County’s white population. In an address given prominent coverage by the *Easton Gazette*, Rasin declared:

. . . the greatest obstacle the negro seems to have now is the necessity of high social acquirement. . . . Let us labor energetically and perseveringly to acquire good manners and a strong and willing mind to feel the best and do the best toward all men and God. . . . Let’s not go to jail except on a Mercy and Help visit, and the State prisons must be left empty of negroes. Don’t be idle, for idleness is the mother of crime, but labor is dignifying. . . . Let each individual of the race set out to do all in his power to better the moral condition of our people, . . . believing, and praying that God will help us change for the best.<sup>17</sup>

Implicit in Rasin’s call for black self-improvement was the notion that given the general indifference, if not hostility, of the white community to black progress, African Americans had to rely upon themselves if they hoped for any improvements in their lives. Talbot County’s blacks repeatedly emphasized the theme of self-reliance and independent action throughout the post-Civil War period. As early as 1872, Easton’s black community organized a building association to encourage savings for home ownership. Blacks in the Bozman community formed their own debating society in 1894 to develop their skills at public presentation, and so compelling was their dialogue that the *Easton Gazette* noted that “quite a number of white folks visit their meetings.” In 1900, a group of young black men, excluded from a newly formed all-white YMCA, engaged in an effort at establishing their own organization for the moral and physical improvement of Talbot County’s African American population. Shortly thereafter, a group of black women in Bellevue established a “Woman’s Day” at which time they delivered papers

at their church that, according to the *Gazette*, “were of a high intellectual order and were burdened with the best advice for the race.” And in Easton, a Talbot County correspondent for the Baltimore-based *Afro-American Ledger* urged his readers to the north to “send us a few young men down here” to open a grocery business for the black community. “The boys of this place are not anxious for such work,” he declared, “and hence for years we have been buying everything from the white man.”<sup>18</sup>

The African American community’s establishment of black churches throughout Talbot County provided an institutional base for racial progress apart from white interference and reinforced its emphasis on self-reliance. The church became, as one historian has put it, “the center of the black community’s civilization.” The establishment of separate black churches in Talbot County pre-dates the Civil War, with the first black congregation organized in Easton in 1818 as the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church. Within a few years, free blacks in Hole-in-the-Wall and Ivytown had also organized their own separate religious communities. After the war, independent black religious activity proceeded apace. The Easton A.M.E. congregation in 1870 raised sufficient funds among its members to construct a new worship building. Black congregations also constructed churches in the towns of Trappe, St. Michaels, Royal Oak, Bellevue, and Unionville. The establishment of black congregations was augmented by black religious camp meetings, held outdoors during the summer months, to spur religious enthusiasm and sustain congregational memberships. These camp meetings became a highlight of the Talbot County summer season, with their popularity becoming so widespread that they were one of the few social venues where whites and blacks intermingled.<sup>19</sup>

The growth of black churches was due in no small part to the expansive definition that their congregants gave to their religious mission. Black churches served as the focal point of African American community life and played an especially significant role in promoting black political efforts. As early as 1871, Talbot County Democrats were accusing their Republican counterparts of holding political rallies at religious services in black churches, a charge that appears fully merited. In 1881, the *Star Democrat* reported that the Rev. Daniel Draper of the Bethel A.M.E. Church in Easton had “harangued his congregation in a political speech, in which he took occasion to say, ‘the word white must be stricken out of the Constitution.’” And two years later, the *Easton Gazette*, normally sympathetic to the Republican cause, observed that “it will soon be time . . . when the churches of the colored people will be turned into hustings for republican speeches to fire the colored heart into voting for the republican ticket.”<sup>20</sup>

Black political involvement was a hallmark of African American life in Talbot County throughout the late nineteenth century. Beginning in 1870 when Maryland blacks were first given the franchise via the Fifteenth Amendment, large black turnouts at all elections and consistent support for the Republican Party were not only commonplace, but a rule without exception. Black political activity in Talbot County is stark evidence of what historian Steven Hahn has termed “the most revolutionary of moments

in an era of revolutionary change. . . . [Blacks] eagerly embraced the elective franchise and sought mightily to make its peaceful use the bedrock of a new political world.”<sup>21</sup>

At the earliest moments in the postwar era, black eagerness to be involved in the political process was evident. In 1867, three years before blacks were able to vote in Talbot County, Nicholas Willis on the Clora Dorsey Farm recorded in his diary, “Nathan came home this morn having visited Balto [Baltimore] as a Delegate to the Rad. [Republican] Convention. I think I ought to charge him two days on acct of talk with the hands. They cannot do their work for their talk.” In August of 1870, with the advent of black voting about to take place, Willis noted that “all the Blacks left to go to the Negro Ratification meeting [of the Fifteenth Amendment] in Easton,” and a month later “hands all took Holiday to go have their names Registered so they may vote this fall.” Willis’s workers were not alone. By Election Day, close to 1,400 Talbot County blacks had registered to vote in the November election.<sup>22</sup>

On November 8, 1870, Talbot County voters, both black and white, surged to the polls. Willis recorded that “the Negroes crowded to the polls to vote this being for the first time.” The Democratic press urged white voters to match black enthusiasm for voting. “All who are for a white man’s government—a government of intelligence against a government of ignorance . . . a government of civilization against a government of barbarians . . . the time for action has arrived,” urged the *Star Democrat*. By the end of the day, 1,760 people voted for the Democratic Party, while 1,500 people voted for the Republican Party—an eighty-six-percent turnout—and the *Star Democrat* reported that with very few exceptions, white voters all supported the Democratic ticket and black voters the Republican ticket.<sup>23</sup>

The results of the 1870 election set the tone for Talbot County elections for the next forty years. With few exceptions, voter turnout never dipped below eighty percent during this period and in gubernatorial election years consistently exceeded ninety percent. Blacks continued to register in large numbers and to vote uniformly Republican throughout the otherwise bleak era of Jim Crow. In the congressional election of 1890, Talbot was the only Maryland county to vote Republican. Seven years later, the *Easton Gazette* reported that the black vote in Talbot was continuing to grow despite the overall shrinkage in the county’s black population. As late as 1904, the *Gazette* again reported that, despite Democratic efforts, “the colored voters of Talbot were never more solidified, nor did they ever poll better tickets. The Jim Crow law and threats in general from democratic sources cemented them against the money influence.”<sup>24</sup>

Democratic efforts to combat black Republican voting largely consisted of calls for white voters to adhere to the color line, while castigating African American voters as “black vomit.” Typical of this approach was a *Star Democrat* editorial in 1871: “The Democrats in the several districts must go to work and bring every man to the polls. Every white vote will be needed to keep the county in white hands.” The newspaper’s concern was justified. In 1881 it lamented that “the negroes are always on hand to register and vote. Democrats are often indifferent about registering and voting. If there

was a new registration of voters ordered, every negro would promptly go and register . . . while hundreds of white men would not take the trouble to register." The *Easton Ledger* concurred, stating that a black voter, unlike his white counterpart, enjoyed the process of voter registration. "It is indicative of his power as a voter if not suggestive of his responsibility as a citizen," the *Ledger* observed. "It is a display of his equality before the law."<sup>25</sup>

Democratic calls for racial solidarity continued throughout the period, only occasionally interrupted by efforts to convince black voters that voting for the Republican Party was a fool's errand. Evidence confirms the claim that Talbot County Republicans, while eager to receive black votes, were loath to reward blacks with support for elective offices or even appointed positions within the party. Only one black Republican candidate ever achieved placement on the ballot for elected office throughout this period. Additionally, the Talbot County Central Republican Committee remained uniformly white during these years, and party officials appointed overwhelmingly white delegations to the Republican state nominating conventions. Despite this Republican inertia, blacks continued to support the party of Lincoln throughout the late nineteenth century. Only blatant efforts at disenfranchising black voters by the Democratic-controlled state legislature during the first decade of the twentieth century had any impact at all on black voter turnouts, and was lauded by the Talbot County Democratic Party. It proclaimed that "the ignorant and irresponsible negro vote has become a menace to good government," and predicted hopefully that Jim Crow efforts by the state legislature would significantly reduce black voting in coming elections.<sup>26</sup>

The hopes of the Democratic Party to eliminate blacks as a political force were to be disappointed, as the county's African Americans continued to vote in numbers that outstripped practically every other southern state during the Jim Crow era. Voter turnout for elections in Talbot County for the first decade of the 1900s stood at seventy-two percent, below the peak of the prior two decades but still among the highest in Maryland. As late as 1910, the majority of black eligible voters continued to turn out for Talbot County elections. Several factors contributed to aiding Talbot County blacks in exercising their voting rights. Most broadly, race relations in Maryland had historically played out in a less virulent fashion than in states farther south. The proximity to the free North and an economy based on farms and small plantations had lent themselves to a more paternalistic form of racism than was the norm elsewhere. In Talbot County especially, the anti-slavery stance of the early Methodist Church and the county's substantial Quaker population had acted to impede the most violent tendencies of slaveholders and contributed long-term to a less charged racial atmosphere. Terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan never gained a foothold in Talbot County after the war, and there is no recorded incident in the county of lynching, which was epidemic in other parts of the South. Certainly, Talbot County whites routinely treated African Americans in a discriminatory fashion—the local newspapers reported that police incarcerated blacks for seemingly minor offenses and the number of blacks in



the county's jails was out of proportion to their actual share in the overall population. But racist actions against African Americans in Talbot County were largely nonviolent and did not provide an overwhelming obstacle to black involvement in civic life.<sup>27</sup>

Contributing as well to the preservation of black political rights was the persistence of a viable two-party system in Maryland that acted, as a leading historian of the period has labeled it, as an “institutional firebreak” against disenfranchisement. While only occasionally prevailing at the polls in statewide elections, the Republican Party in Maryland remained a viable political entity throughout this period, and whites in the Democratic Party did not have free rein to enact the wholesale political exclusion of black Republicans. Additionally, the large number of immigrant voters in the state generally opposed disenfranchisement efforts out of a fear that such actions would impact them as well. The existence of a large free black population prior to emancipation, which was especially prevalent in Talbot County, had lent itself to a tradition of assertiveness and independent thinking by the state's African American community in the face of white hostility. Blacks asserted their defense of voting rights early on. Shortly before the 1870 state election, organized African Americans marched into Easton dressed in military regalia and fully armed. Ostensibly there to help celebrate the enactment of the Fifteenth Amendment, the black militia men under the command of John Cowgill, a former officer in the United States Colored Troops and member of a local Quaker family, were delivering a message. They would not be denied their voting rights and were prepared to defend those rights if need be.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the paucity of tangible rewards, black voter perseverance was a clear indication that Talbot County African Americans were determined to assert their autonomy in an era largely defined by growing white indifference, and even hostility, to black claims of independence. Throughout this period, the county's blacks consistently demonstrated a desire to assert their freedom by exercising their ability to move, establish independent communities, obtain ownership of their homes and land, explore alternative economic opportunities, gain an education, establish separate religious institutions, and participate freely in political processes. While African Americans were never completely successful in these undertakings, black life in Talbot County changed significantly in the period after the Civil War and did so largely through the efforts of blacks themselves. While true freedom—to take advantage of all that their country had to offer—was still far off for African Americans in Talbot County, blacks as agents of their own destiny had taken the first steps.

## NOTES

1. C. Christopher Brown, *The Road to Jim Crow: The African American Struggle on Maryland's Eastern Shore, 1860–1915* (Baltimore, MD: Maryland Historical Society, 2016), 292; Dickson J. Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass: The Maryland Years* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 183.

2. Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 461–69. See also Timothy S. Huebner, *Liberty and Union: The Civil War Era and American Constitutionalism* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2016), 413.
3. United States Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population in the United States, 1790–1915* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918), 36, 783; Hahn, *Nation under Our Feet*, 322; Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790–1915* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 176–77. The town of Easton, with the largest black population in Talbot County, lost fifteen percent of its African American population between 1900 and 1910—U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population*, 98.
4. For Unionville, see Bernard Demczuk, “Unionville: Race, Time, Place and Memory in Talbot County, 1634–1892” (Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 2008); Shepard Krech III, “Black Family Organization in the Nineteenth Century: An Ethnological Perspective,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12, no. 3 (Winter 1982): 440. For black hamlets, see *Easton Gazette*, September 2, 1899; Shepard Krech III, *Praise the Bridge That Carries You Over: The Life of Joseph L. Sutton* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1981), xii; Dickson J. Preston, *Talbot County: A History* (Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1983), 247; Brown, *Road to Jim Crow*, 208; “Their Place, by the Bay,” *Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum Quarterly* (Summer 2005): 14–15.
5. 1900 U.S. Census, Town of Easton, Town of Trappe, MD, *Ancestry.com*, accessed September 23, 2019; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population*, 465–500; Preston, *Talbot County*, 248; Schweninger, *Black Property Owners*, 144–45, 152–53; Hahn, *Nation under Our Feet*, 417–19; Richard Paul Fuke, *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the Confines of White Racial Attitudes in Post-emancipation Maryland* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 46–48.
6. *Easton Gazette*, February 3, 1900.
7. *Star Democrat*, January 10, 1871; *Trappe Enterprise*, October 22, 1884; “The Canning Industry,” *Easton Gazette*, September 16, 1899.
8. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population*, 115; James Dawson, ed., *100 Years of Change on the Eastern Shore: The Willis Family Journals, 1847–1951* (n.p.: published by Charles F. Willis III, 2014), 115.
9. Dawson, ed., *100 Years of Change*, 117, 148, 228–29.
10. Dawson, ed., *100 Years of Change*, 125, 129, 136, 159, 164, 198, 209, 216; *Easton Gazette*, October 14 and 20, 1899; *Star Democrat*, July 22, August 5, 1879; *Trappe Enterprise*, October 29, November 5, 1884.
11. 1900 U.S. Census, Easton, Talbot County, MD, *Ancestry.com*, accessed September 23, 2019; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 57, 111.
12. 1900 U.S. Census, Easton, Talbot County, MD, *Ancestry.com*, accessed September 23, 2019; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 59; *Easton Ledger*, September 9, 1875.
13. Fuke, *Imperfect Equality*, 105; W. A. Low, “The Freedmen’s Bureau and Civil Rights in Maryland,” *Journal of Negro History* 37, no. 3 (July 1952), 237; Farah Jasmine Griffin, ed.,

- Beloved Sisters and Loving Friends: Letters from Rebecca Primus of Royal Oak, Maryland, and Addie Brown of Hartford, Connecticut, 1854–1868* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999), 119–183.
14. Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634–1980* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 418–20; *Star Democrat*, April 30, 1872, March 17, 1874; *Easton Gazette*, November 19, 1898.
  15. *Easton Gazette*, November 13, 1897, February 17, May 19, June 23, 1900, July 27, 1901; *Star Democrat*, January 27, 1879, April 4, 1882, November 27, 1888, November 4, 1890.
  16. *Star Democrat*, February 28, 1882; *Easton Gazette*, January 22, April 30, 1898, July 8 and 13, 1899; Carol Lange, “Nathan Hopkins: Leader of His People from Slavery to Present Day” (privately produced and printed by the author, 2014), Maryland Room of the Talbot County Free Library, Easton, MD; James Dawson, ed., *Irregularities in Abundance: An Anecdotal History of Trappe District in Talbot, Co., MD* (Easton, MD: The Talbot County Free Library Foundation, 2010), 62.
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Nathan "Nace" Hopkins, portrait by unknown photographer, r.d. Talbot Historical Society, 1990.0c9.000001

# Joe Gray and Nace Hopkins: Black Leadership in Talbot County, 1870–1901

WILLIAM F. MESSNER

ON NOVEMBER 19, 1901, under the headline “The Negro in Politics: Two Who Died in Poverty on the Eastern Shore,” the *Baltimore Sun* ran a story with the following lead: “Joseph H. Gray, a negro politician and stump speaker of Easton, was buried yesterday. His career, coupled with that of his sometime political colleague, the late Nace Hopkins of Trappe, illustrates the fateful disappointments and failures of the smart country negro Republican politician.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Sun* had it half right. The intertwined stories of Joe Gray (1834–1901) and Nathan “Nace” Hopkins (c.1831–1900) bring into clear focus the challenges that African Americans faced in the years following the Civil War on the Eastern Shore, and the limits that even the most talented and ambitious experienced in attempting to surmount racist barriers. “The insularity and ethnic homogeneity of white Shoremen posed a formidable barrier to the region’s African Americans,” states a recent work on the Eastern Shore. “Because whites there had no tradition of flexibility, their southern cultural mores left little room for blacks to struggle free from the adverse position in which slave traders had initially placed them.”<sup>2</sup>

In the face of this hostile environment, two formerly enslaved blacks—Joe Gray and Nace Hopkins—strove to surmount the racism of the general white population, the indifference and paternalism of their supposed Republican allies, and the economic doldrums that afflicted the agricultural economy of the Eastern Shore throughout much of their adult lives. They succeeded in becoming recognized leaders in their communities and were part of what has been described as “a vast expansion of black political leadership that emerged between 1864 and 1867” throughout the South. While initially African American leaders tended to come from the ranks of freeborn mulattos, in many places formerly enslaved individuals soon stepped to the fore, some because of skills developed as artisans, others—like Gray and Hopkins—as a result of personal qualities honed during enslavement and service in the army. Yet, despite their achievements, because of their color they were denied the economic and political rewards available to their white counterparts. Their lives offer a vivid demonstration of both the possibilities and the limits afforded to African Americans on Maryland’s Eastern Shore during the late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

Joe Gray and Nace Hopkins' lives followed an extraordinarily similar arc. Both were born into slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore during the early 1830s, both labored enslaved for the first three decades of their lives, both enlisted in the Union army during the Civil War, both returned to Talbot County and spent the next thirty years immersed in county politics, and they died within a year of each other. Equally remarkable is the fact that both demonstrated leadership potential despite being enslaved, both became influential leaders in their communities upon returning from their military service, both attempted—with limited success—to become property owners, and both were successful Republican Party principals. The two men, while primarily focused on their respective home communities of Easton and Trappe, collaborated with one another on a variety of political undertakings, and both played important roles in sustaining black support for the Republican Party in Talbot County throughout the late nineteenth century. Neither man left a personal written record, but through the use of public documents, newspaper reports, and the accounts of their contemporaries it is possible to recreate a history of their remarkable lives.

While overlooked by historians writing on a state and national level, Nace Hopkins is remembered today in Talbot County and especially his home community of Trappe over a century after his death. Local writers have lavished attention on Hopkins, and memorials to him endure in Trappe. Hopkins's lasting memory is due in no small part to the power of his personality and his ability to couch his political actions in the mantle of civic engagement. These personal attributes, combined with the relatively accepting, albeit paternalistic, attitude of the Trappe area at the turn of the century toward his civic activities, account in large part for his political success and enduring memory.<sup>4</sup>

Like many enslaved persons, the exact time and place of Nace Hopkins's birth is uncertain, but it is generally accepted that he was born in the area of Trappe in southern Talbot County in 1834. His enslaver was Mrs. Sophia Shehan, wife of Mason Shehan, a Trappe farmer and carpenter of modest means. By the late 1850s Mrs. Shehan had leased Hopkins to Robert McKnett and his wife Mary to work on their farm, Discovery, on the outskirts of Trappe. Even at a relatively early age Hopkins demonstrated leadership potential, as the McKnetts utilized the young black as a foreman and general overseer for their farm in the years leading up to the Civil War.<sup>5</sup>

By the time of the Civil War, Trappe was a village of approximately 300 individuals of whom one-third were black, both free and enslaved. The free black residents, numbering twenty-three, were limited to servile occupations, little different from their enslaved counterparts. The town of Trappe, in turn, was situated in the larger Trappe district, a developing region that encompassed much of southern Talbot County. This overwhelmingly agricultural district had 2,670 residents, 687 of whom were free blacks and 354 enslaved. Among the free black population, there was a small but growing segment that owned their homes and farmed their own land, most often at a distance from whites. These black farmers were able to take advantage of relatively low property values in the Trappe area as compared to other parts of the county, as well as its permissive

attitude toward black property owners, assuming blacks kept their distance and knew their “place.” Having worked for eight years in the midst of this growing agricultural area, Nace Hopkins was aware of the opportunity that it presented for ambitious and hard-working individuals such as he. But first he had to obtain his freedom, and the outbreak of hostilities in 1861 between North and South presented him with this opportunity.<sup>6</sup>

In common with much else regarding Nace Hopkins’s early years, his service in the federal military during the Civil War is shrouded in some mystery. Hopkins himself claimed that he enlisted as a private in the 30th Regiment of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) in November of 1863 as federal authorities in Maryland embarked on a vigorous effort to recruit black troops. Shortly thereafter, he asserted that he was sent home on a sick furlough and never received a formal discharge from the army. Unfortunately for Hopkins, the official records of the 30th Regiment do not include his name, and as a result the federal government denied his efforts after the war to collect back pay and a pension. Robert Mullikin, a Trappe businessman, provided in 1875 an explanation for this situation. He wrote: “Mr. E. D. Thompson who was Deputy Provost Marshal in our County during the war, tells me that Nathan Hopkins enlisted in this County, was sent to Baltimore, was there taken sick and sent home again, and never mustered in the U S Service.” Despite Hopkins’s apparent failure to be officially enrolled in the federal military, his war-time experience, limited as it was, would serve him well in years to come, as he traded upon it to establish a martial persona that would be of significant aid to him in his future civic and political pursuits.<sup>7</sup>

Upon returning to Trappe in early 1864 from his abortive effort at enlisting into the Union army, Hopkins attempted to embark on a new life as a free man with his wife and two children. His initial effort in this regard was unsuccessful as his owner had him imprisoned on the charge of escaping from her service. Maryland was not subject to the Emancipation Proclamation due to the fact it did not secede from the Union, and Hopkins would have to wait to be freed from jail and enslavement until late 1864 when Maryland adopted a new state constitution ending slavery. He then began the process of establishing his place as a free man. Warding off an attempt by his wife’s former enslaver to apprentice their children, Hopkins succeeded by 1870 in procuring a house and small farm valued at \$200 near the village of Trappe. Financed through a series of mortgages, he would work this farm through the 1870s. While his efforts at home ownership and farming were exceedingly modest even for its time, his desire to own his own farm, his willingness to take on debt to finance it, and the support of area businessmen are a testament to his initiative and positive reputation in the community.<sup>8</sup>

Within the span of a decade, Hopkins expanded his ambitions as he developed a vision of establishing an African American community in an area south of Trappe called Eastfield. To implement his vision, in 1884 he purchased twenty-three acres of land financed by a mortgage of \$561, payable in ten annual installments. Shortly thereafter, he sold a small parcel of this land to James Chaney, a black farmer, in what he hoped would be the beginnings of his community. Hopkins also gained approval from Talbot

County officials to have a road built at public expense that would provide enhanced access to his community, which he optimistically retitled “Money Make Road.” To facilitate this process, as well as gain needed income for himself and his family, Hopkins worked on road maintenance for the county, ensuring that Money Make Road would be adequately maintained. Hopkins’s efforts in this regard were indicative of what one historian has labeled the “very powerful attachment, even among freedom’s first generation, to people, to place, and more generally to the land,” which manifested itself in black efforts at land ownership and community building. Unfortunately, by the end of the decade Hopkins’s dream of establishing a black community fell victim to the depressed agricultural economy that plagued the Eastern Shore in the late nineteenth century. First, James Chaney was forced to abandon his land ownership efforts, deeding back his acreage to Hopkins in 1889, and then Hopkins himself defaulted on his mortgage that same year and had his land repossessed.<sup>9</sup>

Unsuccessful in his efforts at establishing a secure financial foundation for himself and his family, Hopkins enjoyed much greater success in building a robust political



Nathan “Nace” Hopkins and family members, unknown photographer, n.d. The image most likely includes three of Nace’s daughters, as his wife Caroline was eight years older than him. She brought to their marriage in approximately 1857 four children: Charles, Mary, Fanny and Arine. In addition, Nace and Caroline had five more children by 1870: Alice, James, Laurena, Alexander and Madison. Talbot Historical Society, 1987.002.000001a



base in Trappe. His success in obtaining financing for his land acquisitions as well as public sector support for the construction of Money Make Road was an indication of his developing reputation as a person of some stature. Hopkins's sway was manifested in a variety of ways. He ostensibly played a role in the establishment of two schools for blacks in the Trappe area and the founding of an African Methodist Episcopal church on the outskirts of Trappe Village. While documentary evidence for his role in these endeavors is limited, Hopkins's portrayal as a major player in these efforts is suggestive of his growing reputation as a black leader in Talbot County.<sup>10</sup>

No single event played a larger part in establishing Nace Hopkins's reputation as an influential civic leader among the county's African American population than his role in the creation and execution of an Emancipation Day celebration in Trappe. Soon after the conclusion of hostilities between North and South, Hopkins along with several other black friends conceived the idea of commemorating the anniversary of the emancipation of Maryland's enslaved population. They initiated their inaugural celebration in 1867, and Hopkins was at the center of the day's proceedings. James Mullikin, head of the county's Republican Party, recounted Hopkins's part in the day: "It was planned by Nace, bossed by Nace, and made a success by Nace. He marched at the head of the parade in full uniform with epaulets on his shoulders, a colorful sash around his waist, and carrying a gleaming sword. Religious services followed in the colored church at Trappe." So central was Hopkins to the proceedings that the event soon became known as "Nace's Day."<sup>11</sup>

Over the course of the next thirty years, the Emancipation Day parade and attendant celebratory activities grew in size and reputation, drawing crowds of both blacks and whites from throughout the county and beyond. Notable Republican political leaders were regular speakers, and local businessmen provided financing for the day's activities. Held on the eve of Election Day, it was very apparent that a major focus of the celebration was stimulating support for the Republican Party at the polls. The *Baltimore Sun*, on the occasion of Hopkins's death in 1900, described this dimension of the celebration: "Nace Hopkins . . . was the great Republican leader of the colored people in Talbot County. For many years on the 1st of November he would summon the negro voters from all parts of the county and have an emancipation celebration. . . . After getting the negroes together and feeding them Hopkins, who was a natural orator, would address them with a view to solidifying them to vote the Republican ticket."<sup>12</sup>

Judged both by election returns and the response of his political opponents, Hopkins succeeded in his efforts at marshaling black voters in Trappe in support of the Republican Party. As early as 1871, the *Star Democrat*, a paper whose political leanings were reflected in its name, reported that "the Radical-negro party is making a stronger effort in Trappe than in any other district." Two weeks later the paper lamented that "the Democrats of Trappe made a gallant fight against fearful odds. They could not overcome the Mullikin and negro combination." Suggestive of the solid support that African Americans in Trappe provided the Republican Party is the fact that in the first election in which

Maryland blacks took part in 1870, 349 African Americans registered to vote in Trappe and, not coincidentally, the Republican candidate for the state legislature captured 351 votes. The *Star Democrat* observed, "The mixing of whites and blacks at the polls on Tuesday was a new feature in our elections, which would have been amusing had it not been disgusting. With a very few exceptions, the whites all voted the Democratic ticket, and the blacks the Republican ticket." So solid were black voters for the Republican Party in Trappe that the paper in 1877 declared that "every district and precinct in the county did admirably except Trappe; that precinct appears to have suffered from the black vomit." Throughout the remainder of the century, the Trappe area returned strong numbers for Republican candidates based in large part on black voter support. Indeed, Republican candidates succeeded in outpacing their Democratic challengers in Trappe in nearly every election for which returns are available during Nace Hopkins's post-war career. While it is impossible to determine precisely how much of this black support for Republican candidates in Trappe was due to Hopkins's efforts, contemporary observers regularly indicated that his political endeavors resulted in energizing black voters and solidifying their support for the Republican Party.<sup>13</sup>

While Nace Hopkins was engaged in generating black support for Republicans in Trappe, Joe Gray was laboring in Easton, some eight miles to the north, in a parallel endeavor. Gray's path from slavery to freedom was remarkably similar to his Trappe counterpart. Born into slavery in 1834 and enslaved by Easton lawyer James Chamberlain, Gray was sold in 1855 to Dr. Isaac Adkins, a wealthy physician, farmer, and banker. Gray worked for Adkins as a farm laborer and, according to his enslaver, "was regarded by others as well as myself as the ablest man on my place." So highly did Adkins regard his young enslaved worker that he designated him as the foreman of his farm, a position comparable to that held by Nace Hopkins in Trappe. Also, like Hopkins, Gray took advantage of the federal government's decision to enroll blacks into the Union war effort by enlisting in the USCT in late 1863. Federal officials evidently recognized Gray's talents as he was mustered into the Second Regiment of the USCT as a corporal. Gray served for a year and a half in the army, devoting his military service largely to labor details in the unhealthy climes of the Gulf Coast and contracting ailments that would plague him for the remainder of his life.<sup>14</sup>

Mustered out of the service in the summer of 1865, Joe Gray returned to the town of Easton, the center of Talbot County business and political activity. Easton had grown substantially as a result of the placement of the county courthouse there in the early 1700s and its designation in 1788 as the county seat. "Politics and law were the lifeblood of Easton," observed one of its chroniclers, and Joe Gray was to find this environment well suited to his ambitions. By 1870, Easton was the largest town in Talbot County with a population of approximately 2,100 individuals, of whom one-third were African Americans. Blacks occupied a variety of occupations which reflected the town's diverse economic base, with plasterers, shoemakers, waiters, iron molders, railroad workers, sailors, and farm workers represented among them according to the federal census of

that year. In this list can be found “Joseph Grey” [*sic*], age 35, farm laborer and now free man.<sup>15</sup>

Joe Gray exercised his newly gained freedom by immersing himself in Republican politics and was soon recognized as an important player on the local political scene. In 1870 he represented Talbot County at the state Republican convention held in neighboring Dorchester County, and within three years the decidedly unfriendly *Star Democrat* described him as the “leader of the Easton darkies.” Six years later, on the eve of a local election, it wrote that a Republican victory would make Gray the “Boss of the county,” and labeled him “the negro dead-beat Joe Gray” who was the most prominent and influential Republican speaker in the region. The paper declared that Gray was “a lazy, loafing scalawag, a blasphemous, ignorant nincompoop, gifted with gab, and just the kind of an instrument to influence the ignorant voters of his color.” The *Star Democrat* warned that if the Republicans were successful in seizing control of the county government, Gray would be appointed to the plum job of keeper of the county almshouse, which, it asserted, would be a “calamity” as it would allow him to “crack his whip over the heads of poor whites and blacks alike.”<sup>16</sup>

The *Star Democrat's* concern was well founded. Gray's influence in Republican circles by the late 1870s had grown to such an extent that he was considered for appointments to several county and state offices by the Republican Party. Ultimately unsuccessful in gaining his party's support for a patronage position, Gray in 1880 became the first African American in the county's history to run for an elected office. Although defeated in his effort to become Talbot County sheriff, his second-place finish, and the fact that he outpolled a white Republican candidate for the office, reinforced his image as a major player on the local political scene. He continued to represent Talbot County Republicans at a variety of regional and state political gatherings and was regularly called upon to speak at political rallies throughout the county. Gray partnered with his Trappe colleague Nace Hopkins in these electioneering efforts, and the two often traveled to each other's hometowns to speak at political gatherings in support of Republican candidates. Gray's growing influence did not go unnoticed by Talbot County whites, who were hostile to the notion of an assertive and ambitious black man. The local Democratic press made Gray its most prominent object of political vituperation, and on more than one occasion he was the target of physical threats and attempted assaults, none of which deterred him from his political activity.<sup>17</sup>

Voter registration numbers and election returns for Easton for the three decades that span Joe Gray's political career suggest that he had significant success in marshaling black support for Republican candidates. From 1870 to 1900, black voter registration numbers in Easton held constant even though the African American population was steadily shrinking. Although Democratic registration numbers consistently outstripped Republican numbers by a factor of fifty percent, Republican candidates in Easton for state and national offices outpolled their Democratic opponents in almost half of the elections held during this period, suggesting that Gray and his political allies enjoyed

great success in turning out black voters. All of this led the *Star Democrat* to rage that “it is notorious that four fifths of the republican party here is composed [of] illiterate negroes, many of them vicious, demoralized, and worthless,” and to accuse Joe Gray of “blowing the bellows” that resulted in overwhelming black support of Republican candidates. While Republican candidates, aided largely by black votes, were seldom successful outside of local elections in Talbot County, the substantial number of votes they were able to tally there and statewide was a key factor in the perpetuation of a two-party system in Maryland.<sup>18</sup>

Joe Gray’s rise to political prominence was the result of his forceful personality, considerable speaking skills, and the ability to establish connections with influential Republican politicians who saw in Gray a useful political ally. Foremost among these individuals was James Mullikin, leader of the county’s Republican Party and a supporter of Nace Hopkins in his political activities in Trappe. A schoolteacher prior to 1861, Mullikin distinguished himself during the Civil War as a Union officer in a variety of federal military operations, including the battle of Gettysburg. Embarking on a law career in Easton after the war, he ran on the Republican ticket for an Eastern Shore congressional seat in 1882, carrying Talbot and several surrounding counties but losing overall due to overwhelming Democratic support in the southern portion of the region. In this campaign Mullikin gained strong voter backing in Easton and Trappe, due largely to the efforts of Joe Gray and Nace Hopkins. Unsuccessful in gaining elected office, Mullikin did succeed in becoming the recognized leader of the Talbot County Republican Party, especially the segment that was closely allied with its black population. For his efforts on behalf of the party, in 1890 President Harrison appointed him U.S. Postmaster for Easton. Mullikin, like Gray, was the frequent target of the *Star Democrat*, and, like Gray, was labeled “the Boss” by the paper. Angered at the repeated use of this charge regarding himself and James Mullikin, Joe Gray retorted, “There are no republican bosses in Easton, there are no republican bosses in Talbot. . . . My race is my witness that we have no bosses in the Republican party in this county . . . No bosses!”<sup>19</sup>

Unlike his white counterpart James Mullikin, Joe Gray’s unsuccessful efforts in gaining either elected or appointed office were symptomatic of the tokenism that permeated the Republican Party’s handling of its African American constituency during this era. The Republican hierarchy expected blacks, according to the leading historian of race relations in Maryland politics, “to form the loyal rank and file, to vote often and always a straight ticket, to be content with token representation in party councils . . . and never doubt that the Republican party was his chief benefactor and only protection.” Given the dearth of political options available for aspiring black politicians in Maryland, Joe Gray had little choice but to fulfill these expectations.<sup>20</sup>

Thwarted in his efforts at obtaining either an appointed or elected position to support himself and his family and unable to engage in sustained physical labor due to disabilities acquired during his military service, Joe Gray turned to the federal government’s newly enacted pension system for financial assistance. That he did so is not surprising. His political connections and wartime service made him a prime candidate

to take advantage of this earliest effort on the part of the federal government to provide a safety net for veterans disabled in the Civil War. Gray was among the first Union veterans in Talbot County to be awarded a federal pension, obtaining \$4 a month in 1867 based upon having developed chronic rheumatism during his military service. He was then successful in having this amount doubled in 1885 due to Republican congressional influence, and increased again to \$17 in 1900, an amount his widow continued to draw after his death. His political connections and knowledge of the pension system, borne out of his numerous interactions with the federal government petitioning for increases in his own pension allotment, enabled Gray to successfully serve as a pension agent for other black veterans, eager to utilize his expertise in obtaining federal assistance as compensation for their military service. His efforts in this regard served to reinforce his political influence, leading the *Baltimore Sun* to assert that Gray “had the ear of the Pension Bureau respecting war pensions to negroes in Talbot. This gave him great power among them.”<sup>21</sup>

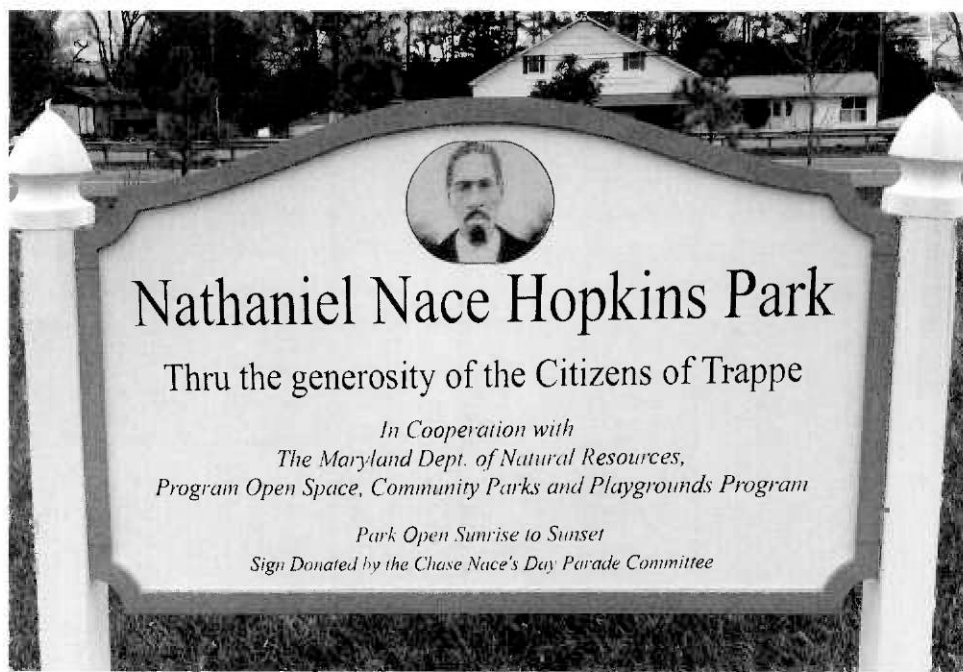
In common with his colleague Nace Hopkins, Joe Gray aspired to own a home of his own and was ultimately disappointed in this endeavor. Not surprisingly, Gray drew on his connections, both personal and political, in his effort toward home ownership. In 1880, after fifteen years of renting a home in Easton, Gray was the recipient of a gift of a home and small lot on Hanson Street in the town’s African American Hill section. Gray received this gift from Polly Blake, an older black woman who was likely a relative of his wife Harriet. Over the next ten years, Gray mortgaged this property four times in order to obtain funds to support Republican candidates for office. Gray gained several of these mortgages from Talbot County politicians, the most notable being Martin Higgins, who would subsequently become the mayor of Easton. Shortly before his death, solely reliant on his small federal pension for income and unable to repay his loans, he lost ownership of his home. As a final blow to the now elderly and enfeebled Gray, in the last year of his life he was falsely accused of pension fraud and jailed for a short period of time before being acquitted of the charge.<sup>22</sup>

On November 15, 1901, Joe Gray died, a year after his colleague Nace Hopkins had passed away, succumbing to ailments that Gray had first contracted during his Civil War service. The *Baltimore Sun* summarized his political career:

When enfranchisement of the negroes came, Gray went into politics as a leader of his race. . . . He took in charge for the white Republican leaders their campaigns for the colored voter. He was the best negro political stump speaker in Maryland; and but few of the white stump speakers in Talbot, if any, could equal him. Time and again he solidified the negroes against the Democrats and won victories for the white Republican leaders. In whatever way the Democrats thought they had caught some of the negro vote Joe Gray and Nace Hopkins would get up an emancipation celebration every November 1, and on election day there would be a solid negro Republican phalanx at the polls.<sup>23</sup>

Within a few years after the deaths of Nace Hopkins and Joe Gray, voting patterns in both Trappe and Easton began to change as a result of Democratic efforts to suppress black voting combined with the void in political leadership left by the passing of Hopkins and Gray. Democratic candidates for governor in 1903 and president in 1904 received the majority of votes in Trappe for the first time since the Civil War. At the same time, compared to 1900, voter turnout declined by thirty-one percent and twenty-eight percent respectively, with Republican votes experiencing the largest declines (forty-five percent and thirty-three percent). In Easton, voter turnout in these years declined by twenty-seven percent and twenty-three percent, with the number of Republican votes especially diminished (thirty-one percent and twenty-seven percent). While Democratic efforts at suppressing black voting were not as successful in Maryland as they were in other southern states, voter turnout numbers in Talbot County would never again reach the levels that had been attained during the thirty years of Hopkins's and Gray's political leadership.<sup>24</sup>

In the years since the deaths of Nace Hopkins and Joe Gray, despite their remarkably similar life paths, their stories have been given starkly dissimilar treatments. Nace Hopkins's history and accomplishments have remained in the memory of his local community, while Joe Gray has vanished from view. In Nace Hopkins's hometown of Trappe, his grave has become a public landmark, a park was established in his name, his Emancipation Day celebration—Nace's Day—is still periodically observed, and newspaper features are still published describing his achievements. Joe Gray, by contrast,



Dedication sign in Nace Hopkins Memorial Park, South Main Street, Trappe, Maryland. Photograph by William F. Messner, February 24, 2020. Courtesy of photographer

is virtually invisible, unknown in Easton and little noted elsewhere. Their differential treatment is due to a combination of factors having to do with the men themselves and the environments in which they worked. While both were black men immersed in politics in an era unfriendly at best to such activity from former slaves, Nace Hopkins developed an image for himself as a civic-minded individual engaged in a variety of apolitical activities for the uplift of his people and the betterment of his community. The term “politician” was seldom, if ever, applied to him during his lifetime. Hopkins’s positive image was helped further by the fact that he engaged in his political work in Trappe, a community that was a Republican stronghold with a history of paternalistic tolerance for African Americans, especially those who cloaked their actions in the nonthreatening garb of civic improvement and celebration.

Joe Gray, on the other hand, has become a forgotten man, due largely to the image which he developed as strictly a politician—a “Boss”—and a black one at that, manipulated and exploited by white politicians such as Joseph Mullikin. Unlike Nace Hopkins, Joe Gray made no effort at cloaking his political activity in civic robes, and even engaged in the radical action—for a black man—of running for public office. He also lived and worked in Easton, a town decidedly less sympathetic to Republican political activity than Trappe, especially when practiced by a formerly enslaved individual. Additionally, Easton was home to a Democratic newspaper that, while completely ignoring Nace Hopkins, regularly attacked Joe Gray in the most vituperative fashion possible. As an assertive and unapologetic black man, Gray’s activities brought into clear view the racism that was endemic to the period. Finally, Gray’s exclusive focus on political advancement, in contrast to Nace Hopkins’s emphasis on civic celebration, may well have grown unappealing after his death for a black population disenchanted with the meager rewards available from white-dominated politics. Given these factors, it should be no surprise that Nace Hopkins today is remembered as a community hero while Joe Gray has become the invisible man.

Despite the differing public memories, the reality of the lives and legacies of Nace Hopkins and Joe Gray are analogous. Both men faced substantial obstacles in making the transition from enslavement to freedom, and both men at the end of their lives had precious little of a financial sort to show for their labors as free men. In the political realm as well, Joe Gray’s unsuccessful efforts at gaining either elected or appointed office and Nace Hopkins’s shrouding of his political work in military pomp and circumstance are a reminder of the limits of white tolerance for black independent action. Both men were victimized by the racism of the period that limited their advancement despite their ample skills and initiative. In this sense, their lives are an object lesson in the enormous barriers faced by even the most talented and ambitious African Americans in the years after the Civil War. But victimized as they were, to portray these men as merely victims is to do a disservice to them, and to the historical record. Gray and Hopkins provided models of initiative and assertiveness for a people long assumed to be naturally subordinate to their white superiors. Both became recognized as leaders in their respective communities and both played significant roles in building and sustain-

ing black political involvement in Talbot County in an era when African American political activity in other areas of the South was on the wane. Certainly, voting records and contemporary reports provide ample evidence that in their home communities of Trappe and Easton blacks remained highly engaged in political processes through the end of Gray and Hopkins' lives. With the passing of these two men, black political activity in Talbot County began a steady decline, a product of growing white hostility to African American political participation unimpeded by the leadership provided during their lifetimes by Nace Hopkins and Joe Gray.

## NOTES

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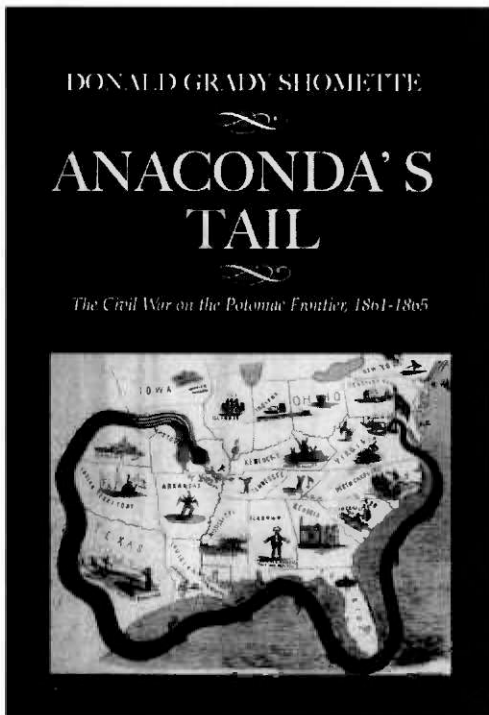


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# Maryland Historical Society's Brewington Book Prize 2020

Donald Grady Shomette, *Anaconda's Tail: The Civil War on the Potomac Frontier, 1861–1865*



AFTER CAREFUL DELIBERATION on several book titles on the Chesapeake Bay and U.S. maritime history published in 2019, the Maritime Committee of the Maryland Historical Society has awarded the 2020 Brewington Book Prize to Donald Grady Shomette for his self-published *Anaconda's Tail: The Civil War on the Potomac Frontier, 1861–1865* (2019).

The “tail” in reference is derived from the print featured on the cover of the book, which displays the blockade of the South in the form of a curled anaconda, the tail of which lies in the Chesapeake Tidewater. The recounting of actions both on the waterway and land blend into a single history that enhances understanding and appreciation, as *Anaconda's Tail* places Southern Maryland's significant role in the context of both the major Northern and Southern Civil War efforts in stark relief.

According to Dr. Edward C. Papenfuse, “By using the framework of the transportation network, official army and navy accounts, and the uneven intelligence gathering of the military and judicial authorities, including the notorious Pinkerton, Donald Shomette . . . has woven a narrative of regional resistance, racism, and the brutal military occupation of Southern Maryland that is inevitably long and worthy of multi-volumes but extraordinarily absorbing reading. His balance between what was happening locally and the momentum of the war on a national scale provides an exceptional perspective of the progress of the conflict from the standpoint of Southern Maryland as well as insight into the terrible consequences of a sharply divided state and nation. While the details are starkly different it has a decidedly familiar ring in today's world.”

Donald Grady Shomette is a nationally known maritime historian and, for more than two decades, a staff member of the Library of Congress. Author of eighteen books,

and contributor to many professional journals, encyclopedias and anthologies of history, archaeology, and poetry, his writings have also appeared in such publications as *National Geographic*, *History and Technology*, and *Sea History*. He is thrice winner of the prestigious John Lyman Book Award for Best American Maritime History, recipient of the Calvert Prize for historic preservation, and holds an honorary Ph.D. from the University of Baltimore.

Starting in 2016, The Brewington Book Prize has been awarded annually by MdHS for the best book on maritime history related to the Chesapeake Bay or the nation. The prize comes with a \$500 honorarium and is named for Marion V. Brewington (1902–1974), a legendary maritime curator and historian from Salisbury, Maryland. During World War II, he was the curator for the U.S. Navy. After the war, he was the maritime curator of MdHS, a trustee of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, and later held curatorial and administrative positions at the Peabody Museum of Salem, Massachusetts, and the Kendall Whaling Museum in Sharon, Massachusetts. His books include *Chesapeake Bay: A Pictorial Maritime History* and *Chesapeake Bay Log Canoes and Bugeyes*.

### **Previous winners of the Brewington Book Prize:**

- 2019 Judge John C. North II, *Tradition, Speed, and Grace: Chesapeake Bay Log Sailing Canoes* (St. Michaels, MD: Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, 2018)
- 2018 William Fowler Jr., *Steam Titans: Cunard, Collins, and the Epic Battle for Commerce on the North Atlantic* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017)
- 2017 Donald Grady Shomette, *Privateers of the Revolution: War on the New Jersey Coast, 1775–1783* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2016)
- 2016 Katie Livie, *Chesapeake Oysters: The Bay's Foundation and Future* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2015)

## Book Reviews

*A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865–1920.* By Dennis Patrick Halpin. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. 234 pages. Notes, bibliography, index. Cloth \$38.29.)

The principal theme of Dennis Patrick Halpin's book on black reconstruction in Maryland is the overlooked importance of the immediate post-Civil War generation of black activists from Baltimore. Throughout he stresses how they have been largely ignored or forgotten with regard to their significant contributions to the advancement of Civil Rights in the fifty-five years following the Civil War. He carefully documents how they did so in the face of increasing racist opposition, including three efforts to amend the Maryland Constitution to exclude blacks from voting, the passing of segregation ordinances to prevent blacks from renting or purchasing homes in white neighborhoods of Baltimore, and a U.S. Supreme Court that effectively muted the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution through several decisions including overturning the Civil Rights Act of 1866.

His narrative is well worth reading. To an extent he accomplishes his goal by identifying the work of such leaders as Reverend Harvey Johnson (1843–1923) and exploring their opposition as evidenced in the Baltimore *Sun* and the racist speeches of mostly Democratic politicians. But therein lies the most significant flaw in the overall argument of the book. He fails to explore such important voices as the *Baltimore American* and of white supporters of the civil rights of the black community.

There is no question that the black community had strong leadership in the period covered by the book (1865–1920), although Professor Halpin does overlook the earliest post-war leaders such as Alfred Ward Handy, and does not fully articulate the role of women such as Amelia Etta Hall Johnson. While he reproduces a hitherto unknown photograph of her, he would have done well to include the 1891 assessment of her work by I. Garland Williams in his *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors*. There Garland devotes more space to her accomplishments than he does to Baltimorean Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and then follows up with a portrait-illustrated newspaper account of Amelia Johnson that appeared in the *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* in 1892.

Nor is his assessment of Reverend Harvey Johnson, Amelia's husband, as nuanced as it might have been. As Johnson explained to the men (all lawyers) who appear in the 1910 photograph on the cover of Halpin's book, the actual "Brotherhood of Liberty," which Johnson founded in 1885 and was active until 1890, had little to do with promoting blacks as lawyers permitted to practice in Maryland. Instead it was mainly focused on getting black teachers into Baltimore schools. To be sure, the Brotherhood published *Justice and Jurisprudence: An Inquiry Concerning the Constitutional Limitations of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendment* in 1889, and in 1900 perhaps funded

*The Power-Holding Class versus the Public: Imaginary Dialogue of McKinley and Hanna*, an attack on Republicans in power, both by John Henry Keene, a white lawyer who, along with Everett J. Waring, the first black lawyer to practice before the Supreme Court, unsuccessfully defended Navassa Island workers in the 1889 revolt trial. While some dispute Keene as the principal author of *Justice and Jurisprudence*, a book largely about the legal defense of the Fourteenth Amendment, they are mistaken, as Mark Twain's protégé, the prominent black Baltimore lawyer Warner T. McGuinn, pointed out in a lecture given in 1914, and as was also pointed out in a biography of Keene published not long after his death that same year.

Professor Halpin largely ignores the white contribution to the black struggle for civil rights and overlooks altogether Margaret Callcott's pioneering work *The Negro in Maryland Politics, 1870-1912* (1969). Reverend Johnson and the Brotherhood of Liberty cooperated with, and were assisted by, some in the white community. Rather than explore the *Baltimore American* and other newspapers and pamphlets published in Baltimore, he relies heavily on the Democrat-leaning *Sun*, leaving the impression that the black community was left to fight racism and the attack on their civil rights largely alone.

Mark Twain, in his 1885 offer to fund the legal education of a talented black, Warner T. McGuinn, was right that "the shame is ours, not theirs. We should pay for it." There were white voices in Baltimore who supported the black community. The justices of the Supreme Bench who opened up the courts to the black lawyers of Baltimore City featured in the 1910 photograph on the cover of Professor Halpin's book, Archibald Stirling, who argued the Navassa case with Everett J. Waring, and Elisabeth Coit Gilman, perennial socialist and graduate of Johns Hopkins University, where her father had been the first president, are but three examples among many.

While he fails to breathe life into his subjects, including those in the image on his cover, and does not explore their strengths and weaknesses, in all Professor Halpin does document the fundamental racism that afflicted Baltimore and much of the nation in the years prior to 1920. He is correct that central to the fight against prejudice and for equal opportunity was the Reverend Harvey Johnson, who he rightly argues has been unfairly overlooked by scholars who have focused mostly on the generation that came after. Reverend Johnson's whole life and writings, from *The Hamite*, which was the topic of his most popular sermon and which he first published in 1889, to his editorial letter of 1920 published in the *Baltimore American*, were a fight against racial prejudice. By 1920, and perhaps many years before, he was, however, opposed to the social intermingling of the races, but stressed instead their equality of intellect and their individual achievements in all walks of life. It would take those who came after Reverend Johnson to recognize that social integration was as important as race equality, and that the doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, separate but equal, had no place in American life.

Edward C. Papenfuse  
Baltimore, Maryland

*Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home.* By Richard Bell. (New York: 37 Ink, Simon & Schuster, 2019. 336 pages. Illustrations, index, notes. Hardcover, \$27.)

The mere thought of one's children disappearing without a trace is among the worst parental nightmares imaginable. In *Stolen*, Richard Bell confronts the reader with this horror on the first page with the plight of ten-year old Cornelius Sinclair imprisoned in the belly of a ship preparing to transport him to the hellish fields of the Deep South and, almost surely, a lifetime of slavery in places such as Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi that were experiencing an influx of planters whose demand for cotton pickers and sugarcane cutters was insatiable.

The good news is conveyed in the book's title: Cornelius, and other boys kidnapped at the same time, made it home. But this is tempered mightily by Bell's sober account of the fearsome kidnapping gangs operating out of Philadelphia (primarily) and other cities, including Baltimore, that snatched street kids, usually boys, robbing them of their freedom, family, and friends. Bell's tale of these five boys seems the exception, not the rule, for human traffickers such as the notorious Patty Cannon gang enticed youngsters into menial jobs such as hauling watermelons, then held them captive in ships and safe houses on the Delmarva Peninsula before either selling them to Baltimore slave traders or moving them south, by ship and then, incredibly, on foot for hundreds of miles. (Bell calculates that an average person walking from Norfolk, Virginia, to Natchez, Mississippi, would require approximately two million steps.)

Bell, an associate professor of history at the University of Maryland and author of books on suicide and incarceration in early America, toiled for four years in thirty-five archival collections across fourteen states gathering material to tell this story. His detailed reference notes occupy fifty-six pages, a remarkable scholarly achievement considering that most of the main characters in the book—unscrupulous criminals with no incentive to write of their experiences and mostly illiterate parents and children—left little in the historical record.

*Stolen* offers both vivid storytelling and scholarly, yet readable, analysis of the slave trade from the 1820s to the onset of the Civil War. This detailed research supports Bell's claim that thousands of free black adults and children were kidnapped into slavery in what became the "Reverse Underground Railroad" between the American Revolution and the Civil War (though his tale of these five boys, the youngest of whom was six years old, centers largely on the 1820s and 1830s). Bell notes that the number of blacks on the Underground Railroad who sought freedom and better lives in the north likely approximated the number who were forced south, and that frequently they traveled the same routes and likely passed one another on their journeys.

Bell's engaging style sets this story in the complex web of slavery in the first half of nineteenth-century America. He explains how the domestic slave trade accelerated

following the ban on the importation of slaves in 1808, with thousands of African Americans in the upper south (Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia) sold south, where they fetched the high prices southern planters were willing to pay. Enter the criminals, grabbing money by abducting anyone with black skin they could—free blacks, fugitive slaves on the run, and the occasional slave from an owner—and, by tearing up free-born and manumission papers that proved victims were free, destroying all hope that those in their clutches would recover their liberty.

*Stolen* examines efforts of abolitionist newspapers, organizations such as the American Anti-Slavery Society, the Quakers and a handful of public officials—notably Joseph Watson, the mayor of Philadelphia—to combat this pernicious practice, to bring kidnappers to justice, and to help the boys return to their families. He brings to light the public relations campaigns of anti-slavery activists to humanize the plight of these black children by telling their stories.

Bell has performed a great service in describing the horrors faced by these boys, and one woman who was kidnapped with them, making them central characters in a narrative that places their experiences in the context of slavery in antebellum America. His linkage of scholarship to learned yet accessible prose illuminates a little understood, horrific chapter in a horrific era: a civil war that, while leading to the destruction of slavery, left in its embers an insidious legacy of racism that continues to infect our culture and who we think we are as Americans.

Charles W. Mitchell  
Baltimore, Maryland

*The Struggle and the Urban South: Confronting Jim Crow in Baltimore before the Movement.* By David Taft Terry. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2019. 273 pages. Photographs, tables, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$59.95, available on Kindle, \$30.95.)

This is a must-read book for anyone interested in African American history, the history of Maryland, Baltimore, and late nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. It makes an important contribution to the study of activism, protest, and the struggle to gain personal and civil rights in this country. The long and inclusive bibliography, which lists a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, and the detailed notes show extensive research using the tools of a professional historian that here are made available to all readers. The facts are interesting, pertinent, clearly presented, and well documented. The descriptions of events and the often moving narration of personal stories, many based on interviews conducted by the author, make the cold hard facts and statistics come alive. The in-depth analysis, which includes interesting new emphases and interpretations, is clear and important. The book is divided into two chronological parts with three chapters each. In addition, the Introduction and Conclusion do



their respective jobs of laying out and pulling together the material and interpretative analyses that are central to this history.

This book characterizes Baltimore as a southern city because of its history of slavery, large African American population and, while not a haven of liberty, as a place where many people, both free and enslaved, managed to get away from some of the worst aspects of rural slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century. Leaders in Baltimore and other southern cities built community institutions including churches, schools, and small businesses. These survived and grew after the end of legal slavery. The post-Civil War advent of Jim Crow laws and practices across the south, including the segregation of public places, the displacement of black workers by white immigrants in the late nineteenth century, and the widespread disenfranchisement of black men all harmed the African American community. Police brutality was rampant and educational resources scanty. Housing was over-crowded and became more so as migrants from rural areas had to squeeze into the neighborhoods where blacks were allowed to live.

The protests of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prefigured the better known and more widely studied civil rights movement of the 1960s. Terry characterizes much of this early activism as “pragmatic black nationalism” that addressed immediate instances of inequality rather than undertaking a broad attack on segregation per se. One main goal was to improve blacks’ material circumstances. Another was to gain equality of educational opportunities and facilities. Some leaders embraced “separatist black nationalism,” which involved separating from white society, and other leaders worked within interracial reform efforts. All three of these presage future types of action and organizations. Most of the ideas and actions were developed and led by African Americans, termed “black agency” in this study. Terry includes thematic topics such as these into his narrative and analysis. He puts Baltimore leaders, protests, actions, and results of those efforts into a national context. It would have been helpful, especially for general readers, to have a comprehensive definition of terms such as “black nationalism” and “black agency” when those were first used.

Readers will meet interesting people from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Harry Sythe Cummings was one of the few African American graduates of the University of Maryland Law School before it ceased accepting black students in the 1890s. Cummings, a Republican, served as the first African American on the Baltimore City Council. He was elected to six terms, beginning in 1890. He and other political activists made alliances with national black leaders as well as with some white groups and helped prevent the disenfranchisement of black men in Maryland. Two clergymen, the Rev. William Moncure Alexander and the Rev. George Freeman Bragg, migrants to the city from Virginia and North Carolina respectively, joined together and formed the newspaper that became the *Afro-American*. Terry makes clear the importance of the masses of working people whose monetary contributions and personal actions were vital to the success of efforts for change. For example, he documents the important role of domestic workers and of women who stayed at home and took in laundry in order

to bring in an income and watch over their children at the same time. These women, often through their monetary contributions to their churches, where the leaders were activists, helped support the organizations that were working for better facilities and more equal rights for African Americans.

Throughout the years covered in the book, the emphasis of protests was generally on equalization of opportunities to obtain decent housing, to attend good schools and universities, to utilize recreational facilities and parks, and other quality of life issues. In the later chapters, the author chronicles the gradual realization that “separate” would always be inferior and the resulting strategic change to fighting to end segregation. Local women, including Lillie Carroll Jackson and her daughter, Juanita Jackson Mitchell, who became a lawyer, led the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP and the City-Wide Young People’s Forum in community building, protests, and actions. Local lawyers, such as W. Ashby Hawkins and Thurgood Marshall, helped lead the struggle to move from unequal and separate to equal and then desegregated when it became clear that separate would never be truly equal.

Many of the leaders belonged to a community in West Baltimore where they often were not only neighbors but schoolmates and sometimes relatives. Residents were among those who picketed segregated public facilities such as theaters and eating places, organized integrated tennis games in the city’s parks, and pioneered the desegregation of Baltimore’s schools in the late 1950s. The author interviewed a number of people who grew up in this neighborhood. He tells stories of golf courses, playgrounds, and baseball games as well as those of children integrating schools in the 1950s, people forcing the integration of the big department stores downtown where, initially, blacks could not shop and later where they could buy but not try on or exchange clothes. He recounts the activism of Morgan State students who demonstrated to integrate the stores, eating places, and the movie theater in the Northwood Shopping Center near Morgan’s campus. Terry’s narration and analysis are inclusive. He writes about discrimination against Jews and immigrants. He includes information about white men and women who worked for black educational, economic, and political rights.

In summary, *The Struggle and the Urban South* is a fine and balanced study of an important topic that is well written, well researched, and full of interesting material and interpretations. The book will appeal both to readers interested in African American and Maryland history and to general readers.

Suzanne E. Chapelle  
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# Index to Volume 114

1 (Spring/Summer): 1–144

2 (Fall/Winter): 145–224

*References to illustrations, tables, and figures appear in italics.*

“acropolis” and “acropolis hill” (University of Maryland, College Park), 160, 162, 163, 164, 166

Adams, Elizabeth Stetson. *See* historic preservation and restoration

Adkins, Isaac, as enslaver of Joe Gray, 208

advertisements and advertisers. *See* newspapers and journals

African Americans. *See* blacks

agency. *See* under blacks

agricultural experimentation and reform: and agricultural experiment stations, 159, 161, 162–63; and education, 159–60, 161–62; and entrepreneurship, 92–95, 96–97; in Europe, 79, 80, 159; and exhibitions, 51, 96, 98, 163; lack of, in early Maryland, 80; and marketing, 93–95, 96–97, 99; methods of, 79–80, 85, 87, 91, 92–93, 97, 99; in North America, as imitative, 80; resistance to, 87–88, 92–93; societies to promote, 80, 95, 97; and soil fertility, 157, 159, 161, 162. *See also* breeding and breeds; Gough, Harry Dorsey; University of Maryland, College Park

“Almost Chattel: The Lives of Indentured Servants at Hampton/Northampton” (Lancaster), 7

*American Mercury*: and censorship, 20–21; and H. L. Mencken editorship, 9, 18, 21, 23, 28; and Margaret Redding submission, 25; and Margaret Redding subscription, 18, 19

*Anaconda’s Tail: The Civil War on the Potomac Frontier, 1861–1865*, by Donald Grady

Shomette, Brewington Book Prize, 217–18

*Appealing for Liberty: Freedom Suits in the South*, by Loren Schweningen, reviewed, 108–11

archaeology. *See* under Rossborough Inn

architects and landscape architects: Cutler, Howard, 170, 171; Dorsey, Griffith, 172, 176; Flournoy & Flournoy, 163, 164, 165; Olmsted Brothers, 165, 175; Shoemaker, Mark, 173–74; Simonds & West, 175

architecture: and campus plans for the University of Maryland, College Park, 165–66, 165, 172, 173; and Colonial Revival style, 165–66; landscape, for the University of Maryland,

College Park, 165–66, 173, 174–75; and plat for the Rossborough Inn, 157–58, 158. *See also* architects and landscape architects; Dairy Building; historic preservation and restoration

Bacon, Agnes (Redding), 11, 13

Baker, Jean H., review by, 105–6

Bakewell, Robert, and livestock breeding, 79, 88, 92

Baltimore: city directories of, 14; contingent of citizens from, to bid farewell to the Marquis de Lafayette, 57, 72n9; as demographic and geographic center of the early United States, 80; migration of blacks to, 187; parade in, to celebrate ratification of the U.S. Constitution, 95; stockyards established in, 95; visits of the Marquis de Lafayette to, 47–48, 48, 72n10

Baltimore Association for the Moral and Educational Improvement of the Colored People, and establishment of black schools, 193–94

*Baltimore Sun* (*Evening Sun*; *Sunpapers*): and H. L. Mencken, 26; and Margaret Redding advertisements, 14; and Margaret Redding articles, 33–34; and political participation of Joe Gray, 203, 211; and political participation of Nace Hopkins, 203, 207; and Redding family, 12, 14; and the Rossborough Inn, 158, 176

Baltimore–Washington Turnpike: 154, 155, 157, 159

Bell, Richard, *Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and Their Astonishing Odyssey Home*, reviewed, 221–22

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (Easton), 196

*Biographies in Sound* (1956 radio program), 33

*Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America*, by Martha S. Jones, reviewed, 112–14

blacks: agency of, as counterpoint to black subordination, 187, 189–91, 192–93, 195, 199; agency of, in employment as laborers, 189, 190–91; and churches as base for agency, 196; at Clara Dorsey Farm, photographs of, 186, 189, 191, 192, 193; educational resources to study the history of, 150; migration of, 187–88; and “Negro Life” photograph, [*inside cover*, 114:2]; population of, in Talbot County, 188; and property ownership, 188, 195, 204–5, 205–6; and veteran pension system, 211. *See also* education and self-improvement, black;

- laborers; political participation; residential clusters, black; women
- Bode, Carl, and appreciation of Rosalind Redding, 33
- Bordley, John Beale, and agricultural reform, 80
- Boyd, Ernest and Madeline, and relationships with H. L. Mencken and Margaret Redding, 23–25, 28
- breeding and breeds: of cattle, 84, 87–89, 90, 91, 93–94, 96–97, 98–99; and genetics, 87; of hogs, 96; of horses, 49, 82, 89, 90, 93, 94, 96; of sheep, 85, 90, 90, 93–94
- Brewington Book Prize, 217–18
- A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865–1920*, by Dennis Patrick Halpin, reviewed, 219–20
- Butler, Melissa, V. Camille Westmont, Dennis J. Pogue, and Elizabeth Totten, “The Rossborough Inn on the University of Maryland Campus: Two Centuries of Change,” 153–85
- Byrd, Harry Clifton “Curley”: as president of the University of Maryland, 154, 166, 168; and restoration of the Rossborough Inn, 166, 169–71, 172, 174, 175–76, 177–78; and vision for the University of Maryland, College Park campus, 164, 168, 174–75
- Calloway, Colin G., *The Indian World of George Washington: The First President, the First Americans, and the Birth of the Nation*, reviewed, 119–21
- Calvert, Charles, as president of the Maryland Agricultural College, 160
- Calvert family, of Riversdale, and ownership of the Rossborough Inn property, 154–55, 156–57, 159–60
- Campbell, Sophia, in Ridgely-Lafayette correspondence, 54–55, 67–68
- Careerfuls*. See under Redding, Margaret (Mrs. Charles F. Lappin)
- Caringola, Elizabeth and Anne S. K. Turkos, comps., “Maryland History Bibliography 2018: A Selected List,” 123–44
- Carroll, Charles, of Carrollton, in Ridgely-Lafayette correspondence, 58, 74n23
- Carroll, James, as son-in-law of Harry Dorsey Gough, 85, 89, 90, 98
- cattle: advertisements and news items about, 87–89, 90, 92, 93–94, 96–97, 98; in early Maryland, 84; images of, 89–90, 90, 91, 91, 161, 163; Longhorn breed of, 79, 84, 91, 91; and preferred size, 87–88, 91; temperament of, 88–89; Shorthorn breed of, 84, 87, 89–90, 90, 91, 91, 98; weight as metric for, 88, 92. See also under breeding and breeds; importation
- “A Certain Kind of Freedom: Black Agency in Talbot County, 1870–1910,” by William F. Messner, 187–201
- Chamberlain, James, as enslaver of Joe Gray, 208
- Chaney, James, and land transactions with Nace Hopkins, 205–6
- Chapelle, Suzanne E., reviews by, 116–17, 222–24
- Chapelle, Suzanne Ellery, Jean B. Russo, et al., *Maryland: A History* (second edition), reviewed, 114–15
- Château de La Grange-Bléneau (Lafayette family estate), 43, 44, 45, 53, 57, 71n2
- Civil War: and black veterans, 188, 210; and enlistment of Nace Hopkins, 204, 205; and impact on the Maryland Agricultural College, 160, 181n14; pension system for disabled veterans of, 211; and service of Joe Gray, 204, 208. See also Brewington Book Prize
- Clora Dorsey Farm, laborers and management of, 190–91, 197. See also Willis family
- Coleman, Sarah Hand, and friendship with Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely, 56, 57
- College Architecture* (Klauder and Wise), 164
- Colling, Charles and Robert, and livestock breeding, 80, 84, 87
- Colonial Revival style. See under architecture
- Colonial Williamsburg. See under historic preservation and restoration
- Considine, Basil, “Letters to a Marquis: New Documentary Findings in the Correspondence of Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely of Hampton and the Marquis de Lafayette,” 43–77
- “Constructing Lives: Free People of Color in Antebellum Cumberland, Maryland” (McGovern), 150
- Cork Wars: Intrigue and Industry in World War II*, by David A. Taylor, reviewed, 107–8
- Cornell University, and documents of the Marquis de Lafayette, 43–44, 64, 76n33
- Crisp, Charles, as Superintendent of Buildings for the University of Maryland, College Park, 168, 169
- Crump, Clare (Redding), 11, 29–30
- currency, in Maryland, 83, 83
- Cutler, Howard. See under architects and landscape architects
- Dairy Building (University of Maryland, College Park), 166, 167
- Davis, John, and purchase of the Rossborough Inn, 155–56
- The Death of Lafayette* (Carrière), 70
- De Barra, Caoimhín, review by, 118–19
- Democratic Party, in Talbot County, 196, 197–99, 207
- disenfranchisement. See political participation
- domesticity. See under Redding sisters; women
- Easton (Talbot County): black churches in, 196; black skilled workers in, 208; as county seat of Talbot, 208; political participation in, 209; population of, 200n3, 208
- Easton Colored School, 195
- Easton Gazette*: and black churches, 196; and black education, 194–96; and Malachi Rasin speech, 195; and political participation, 197, 212; as Republican newspaper, 189; and scarcity of black laborers, 189–90

- education, agricultural. *See under* agricultural experimentation and reform
- education and self-improvement, black: compared with white, 194; and establishment of schools, 194–95; legislation for, 194; and Malachi Rasin, 195; and philanthropic support, 193–94; and school enrollment, 194. *See also* racism
- Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely* (Peale), 56
- Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely* (Saunders), [cover, 114:1], 42
- “Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely and the Ideal of American Womanhood, 1787–1820” (Torchia), 6
- “Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely, the ‘Lady with a Harp’” (Shipe), 6
- Emancipation Day (November 1): as black holiday, 191, 207, 211, 215n12; as “Nace’s Day” in Trappe, 207, 212; and political participation, 207, 211
- Enoch Pratt Free Library, as H. L. Mencken repository, 32
- estate inventory. *See under* inventory
- Evening Sun*. *See* *Baltimore Sun*
- Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, Harry Dorsey Gough advertisements and news items in, 83, 84, 87–88, 90, 92, 94, 96
- fertilizers. *See* agricultural experimentation and reform
- Fitzgerald, Joseph R., *The Struggle Is Eternal: Gloria Richardson and Black Liberation*, reviewed, 116–17
- Flournoy and Flournoy. *See under* architects and landscape architects
- Foner, Eric, *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*, reviewed, 120–22
- fruit: advertisements about, 85–86, 95, 98; and cider, 86, 95; importation of, 85–86; and marketing, 95; and methods for improving, 85–86, 87; and orchard, at the Rossborough Inn, 162; and orchards, at Perry Hall, 85; trees and saplings, Harry Dorsey Gough sale of, 85, 95
- gender roles: in Irish Nationalism, 11, 12; and professional work, 9, 13, 35. *See also* Redding sisters; women
- General the Marquis de Lafayette* (unknown after Scheffer), [inside front cover, 114:1], 42
- genetics. *See under* breeding and breeds
- George Washington and His Generals at Yorktown* (Peale), 46
- Gough, Harry Dorsey: and advertisements about fruit, 85–86, 95, 98; and advertisements about labor, 86–87; and advertisements about livestock, 82–83, 82, 84, 87–89, 90, 92–94, 96–97, 98–99; business interests of, 81, 92, 97; and correspondence with George Washington, 85, 89, 92–93, 94; and establishment of Baltimore stockyards, 96; family of, 80–81, 89, 90; and manumission of enslaved laborers, 86; and marketing, 88, 93–95, 97; and Methodism, 81, 86; and methods of agricultural improvement, 79, 87, 99; and open days at Perry Hall, 96; and the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, 95; portrait of, 78, 90; as president of the Society of Maryland for the Improvement of Agriculture, 95; and purchase of Perry Hall, 81–82; reputation of, 88, 92, 95–96, 98; and Richard Parkinson commentary on, 79, 84, 88, 93, 94, 96; and slavery, 81, 86
- Gray, Joe (Joseph H.): and absence in public memory, 212–13; and army service, 204, 208; and *Baltimore Sun* article, 203, 211; and collaboration with Nace Hopkins, 203, 204, 209; and comparison with Nace Hopkins, 204, 208, 212–14; enslavement of, 204, 208; as foreman, 208; and ill health, 208, 210, 211; imprisonment of, 211; and pension system for disabled veterans, 210–211; political participation of, 209, 211; and property ownership, 211; and Republican Party leadership, 210, 211; and residence in Easton, 208, 211, 213; and *Star Democrat* disparagement of, 209, 213
- Griffith, Dorsey. *See under* architects and landscape architects
- Guy, Francis, and painting of Perry Hall, 89, 91
- Haardt, Sara, and marriage to H. L. Mencken, 27, 29
- Halpin, Dennis Patrick, *A Brotherhood of Liberty: Black Reconstruction and Its Legacies in Baltimore, 1865–1920*, reviewed, 219–20
- Hampton (Ridgely family estate), 7, 49, 51, 52, 64–65, 70n1, 72n11, 81, 97
- Hampton Mansion* (Long), 64–65
- Hanging Henry Gambrill* (Melton), 5
- Harry Dorsey Gough* (att. Stuart), 78
- “Harry Dorsey Gough and Agricultural Improvement in Maryland, 1774–1808,” by Benjamin Hudson, 79–104
- Hartford Freedmen’s Aid Society, and establishment of black schools, 194
- Hatch Act (187), and establishment of agricultural experiment stations, 161, 162
- Higgins, Martin, and relationship with Joe Gray, 211
- historic preservation and restoration: and Colonial Williamsburg, 168, 172; and graduate program at University of Maryland, 149, 154; and vendors for the Rossborough Inn interior, 172–73, 183n33
- Hopkins, Nace (Nathan): and *Baltimore Sun* article, 203, 211; and black agency in politics, 210; and collaboration with Joe Gray, 203, 204, 209; and community leadership, 204, 207, 213; and comparison with Joe Gray, 204, 212–14; and establishment of black schools and churches, 195, 207, 213; and establishment of Eastfield (Talbot County), 205–6; enlistment of, 204, 205; enslavement of, 204;

- as foreman and overseer, 204; imprisonment of, 205; photographs of, 202, 207; political participation of, 204, 207–8, 211; and property ownership, 205; public memory of, 204, 212, 212; and Republican Party leadership, 210; and residence in Trappe, 204–5, 207–8, 213
- horses: advertisements and news items about, 82–83, 82, 84, 87, 94; and horse racing, in Maryland, 49, 82; images of, 82, 84, 90, 163, 189. *See also* breeding and breeds
- Howard, John Eager: career of, 74n23; and praise of Harry Dorsey Gough livestock, 96
- Hudson, Benjamin, “Harry Dorsey Gough and Agricultural Improvement in Maryland, 1774–1808,” 79–104
- importation: controversy about, 92–93; of fruit, 85–86; of livestock, 79, 84, 88, 92, 94, 98–99; society to promote, 97. *See also* agricultural experimentation and reform; breeding and breeds; cattle; sheep
- The Indian World of George Washington: The First President, the First Americans, and the Birth of the Nation*, by Colin G. Calloway, reviewed, 119–21
- inventory: of Harry Dorsey Gough estate, 85, 97; of Henry Miller estate, and value of cattle, 94; of the Rossborough Inn antiques, 175–76
- Jim Crow era, in Talbot County, 197–98
- “Joe Gray and Nace Hopkins: Black Leadership in Talbot County, 1870–1901,” by William F. Messner, 203–16
- John Carman Ridgely* (Sully), 59
- Jones, Martha S., *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America*, reviewed, 112–14
- Knopf, Alfred A. and Blanche, and relationships with H. L. Mencken and Margaret Redding, 9, 21, 23, 33
- laborers: autonomy of black, 189–90; competition for, 190; domestic, 191–93; runaway, from Perry Hall, 86–87, 87; scarcity of, in Early Republic period, 86; scarcity of, in Talbot County, 189–90; skilled, in Easton, 191, 208; varieties of, at Perry Hall, 86, 91, 91. *See also* gender roles; women
- Lady with a Harp: Eliza Ridgely* (Sully), 50
- Lafayette, the Marquis de (Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roche Gilbert du Motier): and beginning of friendship with Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely, 47–53, 71n8, 72n11; and correspondence with Samuel Smith, 47, 53–54, 66–68; and correspondence with women, 45, 46–47; and distinctive friendship with Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely, 47, 56; documents of, 43, 44, 71n2, 71n11, 74n33; and 1824–1825 tour of the United States, 43, 47–49, 48, 51–53, 57, 157, 72n9; and French politics, 55, 62, 65–66; and gift of ewer to Ridgely family, 52, 52, 73n14; granddaughters of, 52, 54–55, 59, 60, 64, 75n24; illness and death of, 65, 68, 70, 70; and lodging at the Rossborough Inn, 72n9, 156–57; and Maryland Agricultural Society invitation to the Western Shore Cattle Show, 49, 51; portrait of, [inside cover, 114:1], 42, 70; and presence of men at tour events, 57, 71n5, 72n10; and presence of women at tour events, 49, 72n10; and propaganda image, 63; and relationship with Maria Malibran, 69, 77n43; and sources of news about Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely, 54–55, 64, 70; and visits to Baltimore area, 47–49, 51–52, 72n10. *See also* Ridgely-Lafayette correspondence
- Lafayette in America in 1824 and 1825* (Levasseur), 47, 49, 52
- Lafayette-Ridgely correspondence. *See* Ridgely-Lafayette correspondence
- landscape architects. *See under* architects and landscape architects
- landscape architecture. *See under* architecture
- Lappin, Charles F., 21, 22, 25, 26, 33
- Lappin, Margaret (Redding). *See* Redding, Margaret
- letters of introduction, function of, 54, 55, 67, 68
- “Letters to a Marquis: New Documentary Findings in the Correspondence of Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely of Hampton and the Marquis de Lafayette,” by Basil Considine, 43–77
- Levy, Peter B., review by, 107–8
- “Lewis Roberts (?)” (unknown), [cover, 114:2], 186
- Lewis, Sinclair, 12, 24
- Lohrfinck, John W., 23, 27, 28
- Lohrfinck, Rosalind (Redding). *See* Redding, Rosalind
- Lothstein, Alexander H., review by, 119–21
- Magruder, Martha Helen, in Ridgely-Lafayette correspondence, 54–55, 59, 74n23
- Malibran, Maria, and relationship with the Marquis de Lafayette, 55, 69, 77n43
- maritime history. *See* Brewington Book Prize marketing. *See under* agricultural experimentation and reform; Gough, Harry Dorsey
- Maryland: A History* (second edition), by Suzanne Ellery Chapelle, Jean B. Russo, et al., reviewed, 114–15
- Maryland Agricultural College. *See under* University of Maryland, College Park
- Maryland Agricultural Society: and breed exhibitions, 51, 98; and visit of the Marquis de Lafayette, 49, 51, 72n11
- Maryland General Assembly: and abolition of slavery (1864), 205; and education for black children, 194; and establishment of Baltimore stockyards, 95–96; and restructuring of state university system, 178
- Maryland Higher Education Commission, 178
- Maryland Historical Society, exhibitions and research library at, 5–6
- Maryland Journal and the Baltimore Advertiser*: and Baltimore celebration of the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, 95; and formation of

- the Society of Maryland for the Improvement of Agriculture, 95; Harry Dorsey Gough advertisements and news items in, 82–83, 85–87, 87, 88, 93, 95; Perry Hall property advertisement in, 81; runaway advertisements in, 86–87, 87
- Maryland State College. *See under* University of Maryland, College Park
- Melton, Tracy Matthew, “‘One Letter or a Million’: The Redding Sisters and H. L. Mencken,” 9–41
- men: as escorts for female travelers, 67; and presence at events held for the Marquis de Lafayette, 57, 71n5, 72n10; and presence in historical sources, 46, 71n5
- Mencken, Augustus, 5, 29, 31, 32
- Mencken, Gertrude, 21
- Mencken, H. L. (Henry Louis): and appreciation of Redding sisters, 15, 17, 18, 29, 30, 31; assessments of, by Redding sisters, 14, 19, 20; and assistance to Margaret Redding, in New York, 23–25, 26; and censorship, 20–21; clipping books of, 17, 22; correspondence of, 16, 21, 24, 27, 31, 32; cultural influence of, 12, 20–21, 33; death of, 32; and dependence upon Rosalind Redding, 29, 30, 31; as early client of Miss Redding, 14, 15; and editorship of literary magazines, 9, 27; literary colleagues of, 9, 12, 23, 27, 33; major works of, 9, 15, 18, 28, 30, 31; and marriage to Sara Haardt, 27, 29; photographs of, 8, 11, 16; and rejection of awards, 31; stroke of, 30–31; unorthodox views of, 12, 17, 19, 20, 27–28, 32
- Mencken House and Museum, 5
- Messner, William F., “A Certain Kind of Freedom: Black Agency in Talbot County, 1870–1910,” 187–201
- Messner, William F., “Joe Gray and Nace Hopkins: Black Leadership in Talbot County, 1870–1901,” 203–16
- “Michael J. Redding and Irish-American Patriotism” (Melton), 5
- Miss Redding (business): correspondence of, 13; as employment agency, 13, 14; motto of, 13, 13; offices of, 14, 22; receipt of, 15; services of, 13; and staffing, 13, 14
- Mitchell, Charles W., reviews by, 114–15, 221–22
- Morrill Act (1862), and establishment of land grant universities, 161, 162
- Morris Building, and Miss Redding offices, 14, 23
- Mullikin, James, and the Talbot County Republican Party, 207, 210
- “Nace’s Day.” *See* Emancipation Day
- Nathan, George, as colleague of H. L. Mencken, 9, 27
- Nathaniel Nace Hopkins Memorial Park (Trappe), dedication of, 212, 212
- National Park Service: and Ridgely-Lafayette connection, 71n8; and scope of the Rossborough Inn restoration, 170–71
- “Negro Life in Maryland” (unknown), *inside cover*, 114:2]
- newspapers and journals: as advertisers, 82; American, read by the Marquis de Lafayette, 55, 58, 60, 71n5, 75n26; and black education and self-improvement, 194–96; and black laborers, 189–90, 193, 196; and black political participation, 190, 196, 197–98, 207–8, 209–10; European, and news about the Marquis de Lafayette, 65; fruit advertisements in, 85–86, 95, 98; horse racing news in, 82; images of, 82, 84, 87, 155; labor advertisements in, 86–87; livestock advertisements and news items in, 82–83, 84, 87–89, 90, 92–94, 96–97, 98–99; and Margaret Redding submissions, 33–34; and the Marquis de Lafayette’s 1824–1825 tour, 48, 157; and the Rossborough Inn, 157, 158–59, 176, 177; stagecoach advertisement in, 154–55, 155. *See also* *Baltimore Sun*; *Easton Gazette*; *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser*; *Maryland Journal and the Baltimore Advertiser*; *Star Democrat*
- O’Donnell, John, and livestock breeding, 88, 91–92, 98
- Olmsted Brothers. *See under* architects and landscape architects
- “‘One Letter or a Million’: The Redding Sisters and H. L. Mencken,” by Tracy Matthew Melton, 9–41
- orchards. *See* fruit
- Osborne-McKnight, Julene, *The Story We Carry in Our Bones: Irish History for Americans*, reviewed, 118–19
- oystering, as competition for farm laborers, 189–90
- packing industry, as competition for farm laborers, 190
- Papenfuse, Edward C., reviews by, 108–11, 112–14, 219–20
- Parkinson, Richard, and commentary on Harry Dorsey Gough livestock breeding, 79, 84, 88, 91–92, 93, 94, 96
- pension system, for disabled veterans. *See under* Civil War; Gray, Joe (Joseph H.)
- Perry Hall (Harry Dorsey Gough estate): description of, 6–7, 81, 82, 96; distillery at, 98; gardeners at, 86; laborers at, 86, 91, 91; livestock at, 85, 90, 91; location of, 79, 80; managers of, 86; nursery at, 95; orchards at, 85–86; paintings of, 89, 90, 91; purchase of, 81, 82, 101n8; runaways from, 86–87, 87
- “Perry Hall: The Country Seat of the Gough and Carroll Families” (Bevan), 6–7
- Perry Hall, Home of Harry Dorsey Gough* (unknown), 90
- Perry Hall, Slave Quarters with Field Hands at Work* (Guy), 91
- Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, 80, 95
- Pogue, Dennis J., V. Camille Westmont, Melissa Butler, and Elizabeth Totten, “The Rossborough Inn on the University of Maryland Campus: Two Centuries of Change,” 153–85

- political participation: of blacks, in Maryland, 203, 210; and disenfranchisement, 198, 199; and lack of black candidates, 198, 210, 213; and tokenism, 210; and tradition of black agency, in Talbot County, 199; and two-party system, in Maryland, 199; and voter registration, 197, 208, 209; and voter turnout, 196–97, 207–8, 209–10, 212; and voting rights, 196–97, 212. *See also* Democratic Party; Gray, Joe (Joseph H.); Hopkins, Nace (Nathan); Republican Party
- Primus, Rebecca, as teacher in Royal Oak (Talbot County), 194
- racism: and black subordination, 187, 210, 213; and educational inequality, 194–95; and paternalism, in Talbot County, 194, 195, 198–99, 204–5; within the Republican Party, 210; and resistance to black agency, 188, 194, 199, 209, 213; and resistance to black political participation, 197–98, 203, 207, 209, 210, 213–14; and segregation, 188. *See also* blacks; whites
- Rasin, Malachi, and advocacy of black self-improvement, 195
- Ramsay, Nathaniel, and correspondence with George Washington, 92
- Rankin, Thomas, and visit to Perry Hall, 86
- Redding, Kate (Catherine Theresa), 10–11, 12, 14, 29
- Redding, Margaret (Mrs. Charles F. Lappin): and *American Mercury* subscription, 18, 19; and *Careerfuls*, 26; correspondence of, 13, 21, 22, 25; death of, 34; and engagement with H. L. Mencken ideas and ideology, 18–20, 21, 34; as entrepreneur, 12–13, 14, 34, 35; literary career of, 24–25, 33–34; and marriage to Charles F. Lappin, 21, 22, 33; and Mencken clipping books, 10, 17, 18, 21, 22; in Minneapolis, 9, 26; in New York, 23–24; photograph of, 35; and relationship with H. L. Mencken, 14, 17, 18, 20, 34; and relationship with Mike Redding, 12, 14, 18; relocations of, 10, 13, 21, 25, 26, 33; and St. Mary's Female Seminary (St. Mary's College), 12, 13; and teaching, 9, 26; work roles of, 10, 13–14, 15, 17–18. *See also* Miss Redding; Redding sisters; women
- Redding, Mike (Michael John): and connection to H. L. Mencken, 14; family history of, 10–11; and gender roles, 11–12; and Irish Nationalism, 11; and literary work, 11, 14; marriages of, 10, 11, 14, 18; and relationship with his daughters, 12, 13, 14, 18
- Redding, Rosalind (Mrs. John W. Lohrfinck): and *Biographies of Sound* interview, 33; death of, 33; and finding *Minority Report*, 31, 33; illness of, 29, 30; and marriage to John W. Lohrfinck, 22, 27; and posthumous work of H. L. Mencken, 28, 32–33; and relationship with H. L. Mencken, 26, 29, 32, 34; and retyping H. L. Mencken letters, 32; and training to work with H. L. Mencken, 23; work roles of, 10, 26, 28–29, 31, 32–33. *See also* Redding sisters
- Redding sisters (Margaret and Rosalind): in Baltimore city directories, 14; childhood of, 12; and domesticity, 13, 23; family history of, 10–11; and gender roles, 10, 12, 13, 23, 34–35; memoirs of, 33–34; and reactions to H. L. Mencken marriage, 27–28; relationship of, 14, 28, 33; and sister Agnes Bacon, 11, 13; and sister Clare Crump, 11, 29–30; and work on H. L. Mencken manuscripts, 18, 26, 28, 29, 30. *See also* Mencken, H. L.; Miss Redding (business); Redding, Margaret; Redding, Rosalind
- Republican Party, in Talbot County, 196, 198–99, 207, 210, 212
- residential clusters, black: Bellevue as, 188; churches in, 196; Copperville as, 188; Eastfield as, 205–6; Hill neighborhood of Easton as, 188; as evidence of black agency, 188, 196; Hole-in-the-Wall as, 188; and land ownership, 188; Unionville as, 188
- Ridgely, Charles Carnan: as brother-in-law of Harry Dorsey Gough, 81, 92, 97, 98; death of, 62, 74n29; as father-in-law of Eliza Eichelberger Ridgely, 47, 49, 60, 62; and interaction with the Marquis de Lafayette, 47, 49, 51, 72n11; and livestock breeding, 49, 97, 98
- Ridgely, Eliza Eichelberger (Ridgely): and comparisons with granddaughters of the Marquis de Lafayette, 52, 60, 64, 75n25; illness of, 60, 63, 68; marriage of, 55, 60, 70n1; and motherhood, 60–61, 62, 64, 66; as musician, 50, 52, 53, 69, 73n14, 74n15; portrait of, [cover, 114:1], 42, 50, 53, 56; and proficiency in French, 68–69; restricted travel of, 55, 57, 58, 64, 67, 74n30. *See also* Ridgely families; Ridgely-Lafayette correspondence
- Ridgely families: of Baltimore, 47, 49, 51; and connection to Harry Dorsey Gough, 81; and gift from the Marquis de Lafayette, 52, 52, 72n14; of Hampton, 47, 49; marriages of, 49, 52, 60; and social events with the Marquis de Lafayette, 47, 49, 51–52, 57, 71n8, 72n11, 73n13; and travel to Europe, 54, 62, 66, 67, 68; and travel to Washington, D.C., 57
- Ridgely, John Carnan, 55, 59, 60, 62, 66, 67
- Ridgely-Lafayette correspondence: chronology of, 53–55; and discussions of politics, 55, 58–59, 60; and exchanges of news about friends and family, 54–55, 58–59, 61, 66; language of, 44, 68; logistics of, 56–57, 62, 74n22, 75n28; and 'meaningful acquaintance,' 48, 72n10; 1957 publication of, 43, 53; repositories of, 43–44; and timing of first meeting, 47–49, 51–53, 71n8, 72n11, 73n13; transcriptions of, 57–59, 60–61, 65–66, 74n22
- Ridgely, Nicholas Greenbury: and concerns about travel, 67; death of, 62; home of, 50, 51, 52, 73n13; and ill health, 67, 77n40; and interaction with the Marquis de Lafayette, 47, 48, 51, 52, 54, 57, 67, 72n11; and travel to Washington, D.C., 57
- roads: 93, 157, 159, 174–75, 206. *See also* Baltimore-Washington Turnpike
- Ross, Richard, and the Rossborough Inn, 154–55
- Rossborough Inn (Rossburg, Rossberg):



- archaeology at, 157, 168–69, 170–71, 171;  
as campus entrance, 160, 166, 174–75,  
179–80; and date of original construction, 155;  
descriptions of, 157, 158, 161, 162, 169, 171, 172,  
182n16; during the Civil War, 160; garden of,  
173 174, 177, 178, 179; keystone of, 155, 172; as  
landmark, 155, 160, 162, 179–80; location of,  
153, 155–56, 156, 179–80; and the Marquis de  
Lafayette's 1824–1825 tour, 72n9, 154, 156–57;  
name variations of, 156; newspaper and  
journal articles about, 155, 155, 158–59, 176,  
177, 181n15; and 1938 restoration, 168–73, 169;  
and 1940 reopening, 173–74; nostalgia for,  
158–59; pamphlet about, 171, 174; patrons of,  
156, 177–78; photographs of, 152, 159, 161, 163,  
168, 169, 170; plat and floor plan of, 157, 158,  
170–72; and the Rossborough Club, 163; sales  
of, 154, 155, 156, 157, 159; site plan of, from  
archaeology, 171; and slavery, 182n15; and soil  
conditions, 161; theft of objects from, 176; and  
vendors for period restoration of, 172–73; and  
Works Progress Administration involvement  
in restoration, 158, 168–72, 171. *See also*  
Rossborough Inn building, use as
- Rossborough Inn building, use as: agricultural  
experiment station, 161–64; alumni association  
offices, 178; boarding house, 160; event space,  
173; faculty club and hotel, 176, 177; laundry,  
162; museum, 175; office space, 180; rental  
property, 162; residence for the Maryland  
Agricultural College president, 161; restaurant  
and tea room, 177, 178, 185n46; student  
housing, 161; tavern and coaching inn, 155–157;  
tenant farm, 157, 161
- “The Rossborough Inn on the University of  
Maryland Campus: Two Centuries of  
Change,” by V. Camille Westmont, Dennis J.  
Pogue, Melissa Butler, and Elizabeth Totten,  
153–85
- runaway laborers. *See under* laborers; *Maryland  
Journal and the Baltimore Advertiser*; Perry Hall
- Russo, Jean B., Suzanne Ellery Chapelle, et  
al., *Maryland: A History* (second edition),  
reviewed, 114–15
- Schweninger, Loren, *Appealing for Liberty:  
Freedom Suits in the South*, 108–11
- Scott, Gustavus, and correspondence with George  
Washington, 94
- The Second Founding: How the Civil War and  
Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*, by Eric  
Foner, reviewed, 120–22
- self-improvement. *See* education and self-  
improvement, black
- sheep: advertisements and news items about, 88,  
93–94; Gough-Washington correspondence  
about, 85, 89, 92–93; in Harry Dorsey Gough  
inventory, 85; images of, 89–90, 90. *See also*  
*under* breeding and breeds; importation
- Shehan, Sophia as enslaver of Nace Hopkins, 204,  
205
- Shoemaker, Mark. *See under* architects and  
landscape architects
- Shomette, Donald Grady, *Anaconda's Tail: The  
Civil War on the Potomac Frontier, 1861–1865*,  
Brewington Book Prize, 217–18
- Sicher, Peter A., review by, 120–22
- Silber, Nina, *This War Ain't Over: Fighting the  
Civil War in New Deal America*, reviewed,  
105–6
- Simonds & West. *See under* architects and  
landscape architects
- Skinner, John, and agricultural reform, 98–99
- Smith, Samuel: career of, 47, 71n7, 76n36; and  
correspondence with Lafayette, 47, 66–67,  
76n36; and transcription of 1833 letter, 68
- Society of the Cincinnati, and letters of  
introduction, 54
- Society of Maryland for the Improvement of  
Agriculture, 95
- soil fertility. *See under* agricultural  
experimentation and reform
- Spectrum of Fashion* (2020 exhibition and  
catalogue), 6
- stagecoaches, 154–56, 155
- St. Mary's Female Seminary (St. Mary's College),  
12, 13
- Stamp, Adele, and the 1940 reopening of the  
Rossborough Inn, 173–74
- Star Democrat* (Easton): and black churches, 196;  
and black laborers, 190; and black political  
participation, 190, 197–98, 207–8, 210; as  
Democratic newspaper, 197–98, 207; and  
disparagement of Joe Gray, 209
- Stretson & Adams. *See* historic preservation and  
restoration
- stockyards. *See under* Baltimore
- Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped into Slavery and  
Their Astonishing Odyssey Home*, by Richard  
Bell, reviewed, 221–22
- The Story We Carry in Our Bones: Irish History for  
Americans*, by Juliene Osborne-McKnight,  
reviewed, 118–19
- The Struggle and the Urban South: Confronting  
Jim Crow before the Movement*, by David Taft  
Terry, reviewed, 222–24
- The Struggle Is Eternal: Gloria Richardson and  
Black Liberation*, by Joseph R. Fitzgerald,  
reviewed, 116–17
- Sully, Thomas, and Ridgely family portraits, 50,  
53, 59
- The Summer Home of Lafayette* (Charles Brothers),  
69
- Sunpapers. *See* *Baltimore Sun*
- Talbot County: black schools in, 193–94;  
economy of, 188, 203, 204–5, 206; population  
of, 188, 204. *See also* Easton; political  
participation; residential clusters, black;  
Trappe
- Taylor, David A., *Cork Wars: Intrigue and Industry  
in World War II*, reviewed, 107–8
- Terry, David Taft, *The Struggle and the Urban  
South: Confronting Jim Crow before the  
Movement*, reviewed, 222–24

- This War Ain't Over: Fighting the Civil War in New Deal America*, by Nina Silber, reviewed, 105–6
- Totten, Elizabeth, V. Camille Westmont, Dennis J. Pogue, and Melissa Butler, “The Rossborough Inn on the University of Maryland Campus: Two Centuries of Change,” 153–85
- Trappe (Talbot County): black schools and churches in, 194–95, 207; population of, 188, 204; property ownership in, 188, 204; public memory of Nace Hopkins in, 204, 212; race relations in, 204; successes of the Republican Party in, 207–8
- travel. *See under* Ridgely, Eliza Eichelberger; women
- Turkos, Anne S. K. and Elizabeth Caringola, comps., “Maryland History Bibliography 2018: A Selected List,” 123–44
- Turner Hall (University of Maryland). *See* Dairy Building
- United States Colored Troops, 199, 205, 208
- University of Maryland, College Park: and campus development, 154, 164–66, 174–75; during the Civil War, 160; establishment of, 153, 164; as a land grant university, 161; as the Maryland Agricultural College, 159–61, 159, 160, 162–64, 181n15; as the Maryland State College, 164; and repainting of the Rossborough Inn building, 159, 163, 164; and shift of focus from agriculture to liberal arts, 166, 175; and study of the Rossborough Inn for future use, 149, 154. *See also* architecture; Byrd, Harry Clifton “Curley”; Rossborough Inn
- An Unpleasant Evening with H. L. Mencken* (Shyre), 34
- Verveer family, in Ridgely-Lafayette correspondence, 55, 61–62, 75n27, 75n28
- voting and voter turnout. *See* political participation
- Washington, George: and breeding sheep, 85, 89, 92–93, 99; and correspondence with Harry Dorsey Gough, 85, 89, 92–93, 94; portrait of, 46; and purchase of livestock, 92, 94, 96, 97
- Westmont, Camille V., Dennis J. Pogue, Melissa Butler, and Elizabeth Totten, “The Rossborough Inn on the University of Maryland Campus: Two Centuries of Change,” 153–85
- whites: and attendance at camp meetings, 196; and control of the Republican Party, in Talbot County, 198; and hostility toward black education, 194; and hostility toward black political participation, 197–98, 203; and hostility toward black property ownership, 188; voter participation of, 197–98. *See also* blacks; racism
- Willis family: and commentary on black voting, 197; diaries and journals of, 190–91; and employment of black laborers, 190; and photographs taken at Clora Dorsey farm, 186, 189, 191, 192, 193
- Wilson, D. S., and conversation with the Marquis de Lafayette, 64
- Wilson, H. Douglas and Alice Henych, as managers of the Rossborough Inn, 177
- Woman’s Exchange (Baltimore), 14–15
- women: absence of, in historical sources, 45–47, 71n5; as correspondents of the Marquis de Lafayette, 45–47; and domestic labor, 189, 191, 191–93, 192; and domesticity, 6, 13, 23, 192–93; and education, among black, 195–96; employment opportunities, for black, 191, 192; and entrepreneurship, 10, 12–14, 35, 192; and presence at events held for the Marquis de Lafayette, 49, 72n10; and professional work, 9, 10, 13, 14, 26, 35; residential patterns, of black, 192; and skilled occupations, 9, 10, 14, 35, 191–92; and travel, 67, 71n3, 77n38; unemployment, as agency of black, 192–93. *See also* gender roles
- Works Progress Administration. *See under* Rossborough Inn

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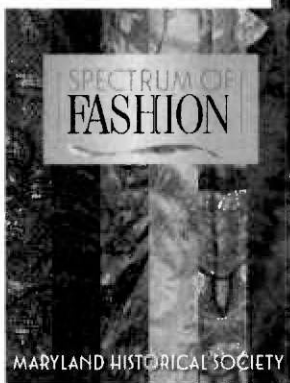
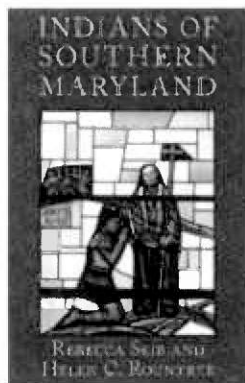
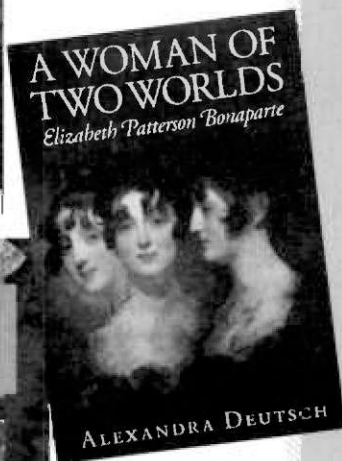
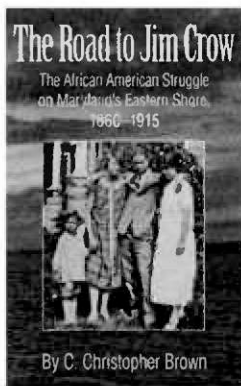
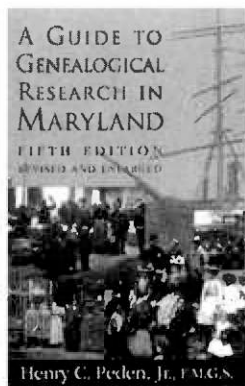
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