



# The Archivists' Bulldog



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## **Roads in Cecil County, 1765-1794**

by Pat Melville

Despite the number of road specific laws enacted by the General Assembly during the years between 1765 and 1794, none pertained to Cecil County. The two laws that were passed dealt with roads in the county in a more general manner. The 1791 act (Chap. 66) authorized the Cecil County Court to straighten and amend public roads through the use of commissioners. The justices appointed the commissioners annually and assigned each one to a section of the county. Their initial assignment required each commissioner to lay out, survey, mark, and bound the roads within his area in as straight a manner as possible. Plats and descriptions were to be returned to the county court and recorded by the clerk. These would serve as the records of public roads. The commissioners also assumed responsibility for any resulting road work which could be accomplished through contracts with other individuals. In addition, the court could appoint supervisors to direct and contract for the road work.

The court (Minutes) in series C635 contain few entries about the implementation of these procedures. The court in August 1792 did establish rates of pay for the road commissioners, surveyors, chain bearers, and axe men, and appointed Thomas Wallace one of the commissioners.

Apparently the new system did not work as well as planned. In November 1792 the court ordered the plats to be returned to the county for recording so that the road maintenance could be well managed. During the 1793 legislative session, the 1791 act was repealed and a "more effectual method" put in place to lay out new roads and amend them.

Chap. 72, Acts of 1793, eliminated the road commissioners and returned to a reliance on road supervisors. Upon a petition from inhabitants for a new road or to straighten or amend an old one, the justices could appoint three persons to view, survey, and plot the route and make a return to the court which could accept, reject, or alter the plan. Then the three men would mark and bound the road and direct the supervisor(s) to clear or improve the road. In addition, the justices would determine damages, with disputes to be decided by a jury. The duties of the road supervisors included the authority to hire laborers, horses, carts, and wagons and to purchase wood and timber. They were required to give notice of road work so local laborers could seek the jobs.

Other information, although sketchy, about roads in Cecil County can be garnered from the court minutes. Most of the entries concern private roads. In August 1786 James Warum filed such a petition. He kept a public ferry on the North East River across from Charles Town, reachable by an existing private road that went through the land of William Lynch. Because he was threatening to block access, Warum wanted the court to officially lay out the route on the basis of the law providing for roads to public places. The county surveyor was ordered to lay out the road.

Either nothing occurred or a new petition for the same road or a different one was filed, because in

October 1792 the court ordered the surveyor to lay out a private road requested by a James Waram [sic]. The records contained insufficient details to reach any conclusion.

In August 1786 Dr. Michael Wallace requested the examination of a new road. At his own expense Dr. Wallace had rerouted the part of Nottingham Road going through his land because it was crooked and prone to flooding. After the ordered review, the court approved the closing of the old road and accepted the new route.

Two months later Robert Evans sought a private road, of less than one mile, from his fishery on the Susquehanna River to the "great road" from Octoran to Rock Run to follow an existing route. The justices granted his request.

More instances of existing roads being officially recognized as private roads to public places occurred in November 1792. One was described as a road from "Red Letter A to Red Letter B on the plat." Without the referenced document, the description alone cannot lead to a location. However, the names of the landowners offer some clues. Henry Gribben agreed to maintain the road and to pay Richard Heath and Joseph Thomas compensation for the use of their property. The second road intersected the public road from Back Creek to Head of Elk. In this instance Richard Bouldin was ordered to compensate John Richardson and Harman Alexander. The other land owners relinquished their rights to damages.

In a statement of the obvious the justices in August 1792 ordered "that the road from the Delaware line to the river Susquehannah be first begun and completed."

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### **Excerpts from the *Calvert Gazette*, June 17, 1905**

[From the *Calvert Gazette* Collection, MSA SC 2965]

The newspaper was published in Prince Frederick, and in 1905 contained general news, local news, fictional writings, poetry, legal notices, and ads. The local news was organized by topic, such as "Personal Mention," or by geographical area, such as "Items from Solomons."

Recent college graduates were recognized. John P. Briscoe, Jr. received a medical degree from Georgetown University, and Elizabeth G. Gourley completed studies at St. Mary's Seminary. Another personal notice concerned M. Elizabeth Talbott, a public school teacher at Lower Marlboro, who was spending the summer with her parents at the Willows.

The obituary column contained two death notices. Carrie E. Bowen, wife of Weldon C. Bowen, died at the age of 39 of heart failure at her home in Bowensville. She was the daughter of the late Reverdy E. King and mother of seven children, the youngest being two months old. Bernard Stinnett, age 24, died of consumption at the Battle Creek home of his uncle James A. Gott. Also noted was the death of Emily Petherbridge, daughter of the late Dr. J.F. Petherbridge, who had lived near Smithville. Her brothers, Dr. Weems Petherbridge from St. Mary's County and W.F. Petherbridge of Anne Arundel County attended the funeral.

The launching of a passenger vessel was described at length. "A company of interested spectators were at Dare's Tuesday afternoon to witness the launching of a little pleasure boat owned by Rev. Benjamin B. Lovett. In fact the gathering ... was at Prince Frederick where the trim little craft was constructed by the ingenuity of Mr. Wesley Shemwell." It was moved to the Chesapeake Bay by wagon. "The vehicle was backed out into the deep water and as the boat was being pushed from its stationary position to become a moving object on the crests of the Chesapeake, Ethelbert, the little son of the minister, christened her by breaking a bottle of lacteal fluid obtained from a

bovine herd over the bow and naming her 'Nancy' for his still younger sister. Rev. Mr. Lovett, Messrs. Wm. W. Duke, Arthur W. Dowell, Paul Cassard and Bert Force were the first passengers aboard."

The news from Solomons included a burglary at the smoke house of William H. Crockett, from which were taken ten hams, two sides of bacon, and a box of Rumford's yeast powder. Following this was an editorial comment: "Each store here has been visited by thieves at different times and it is time these depredations were stopped and the guilty ones made to suffer."

Capt. Thomas Moore, Jr. and his son who had bought a cannery at Solomons from George W. Johnson were making repairs in order to be ready for the processing of corn, tomatoes, and blackberries.

The results of local baseball games were published. On a Saturday afternoon the Lower Marlboro boys defeated the Baden team by a score of 14 to 8. At the same time the Jewell team was victorious over the Friendship players with a score of 10 to 5.

Third District news items included a notice about the career of Morris Chaney, a student at the Maryland University College of Medicine and eldest son of Dr. T.M. Chaney. He "is now enjoying a cruise as an assistant to Surgeon Adkins, of the gunboat Sylvia, in the fleet under Admiral Dickens. After his return upon the seventeenth he will enter the Maryland University Hospital where he has an appointment ... as resident student"

Even a visiting pigeon received a few inches of column space. "A carrier pigeon recently rested two days at one of our neighbors [in the Third District]. The little messenger carried two bands about its little limbs, one of brass and the other of silver. He seemed thoroughly fatigued. One of the ladies first saw him as he sat crouched under the eaves of the front portion of the house.... [W]hen she called him to lunch of wheat, meal and water he ate heartily." After several more feedings, the pigeon departed to continue his journey.

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### THE ARCHIVISTS' BULLDOG

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