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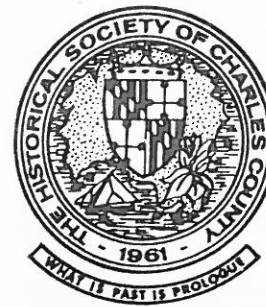
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R. Wayne Winkler, *Editor*

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Charles County Hard Hit By The Civil War.

Charles County was created as far back as 1658. It is impossible to establish who was the particular Charles for whom it was named. Some say Charles II, but in 1658 this monarch was still in exile and Lord Baltimore, who had recently been reinstated in his rights and privileges by Oliver Cromwell, would not have been likely so to offend Cromwell's party. It is probable that the Charles was Lord Baltimore's eldest son, who subsequently became the Proprietary and Governor of Maryland. In the beginning Charles County included all of Maryland lying north and west of St. Mary's and transfers of land in Western Maryland are still on file in the county records. Prince George's County took all this over in 1695. The heritage of Charles is therefore similar to that of Prince George's; but the land is not so productive, consequently the planters did not become so wealthy as their neighbors to the north. The surviving great houses are, generally speaking, of earlier and simpler design.

Charles County, almost exclusively southern in sympathy, was hard hit by the Civil War and has not, to the same extent as Prince George's, found the means to renew its sinews. Wide tracts of the land have gone back into forest; for when the liberated slaves marched away in the wake of the Union Armies there was no one left to till the fields. There are many places in Charles where you can still trace the furrows of the last corn crop under stands of timber now forty to fifty feet high.

The county has come back slowly and surely. It has no suburban developments to swell its tax rolls, and while it is true that a good many northerners have come in and purchased the old places, the plain, charming houses are apt to attract those of simpler taste rather than the very rich. [Editor note: remember, this was published in 1940]. Architects, decorators, landscapers, and laborers are not brought in *en masse* to restore the places over night; these owners prefer to proceed slowly with loving patience and care, to paring their homes back as closely as possible to their original appearance. Such people adapt themselves much more readily to county life than do the rich, and Charles County, therefore, presents a picture of Maryland

life at its characteristic best. The traveler finds a special friendliness in the people, warmer and more spontaneous than elsewhere.

La Plata (local pronunciation; La Playta, the county seat, is a more than usually sprawling Maryland village. In fact, I should award La Plata the palm for hit-or-miss arrangement of its buildings. It is a new place without roots in the 18th century to keep in order. The coming of Pope's Creek railroad in 1868 brought it into being. By that time the river at Port Tobacco, the ancient county seat, had silted up to such an extent that it was no longer possible to ship or receive goods by water, and the trade of the county naturally shifted to the railroad. For several years a controversy raged over the advisability of moving the courthouse. Finally, in 1891, the old courthouse burned down and there was no further reason for opposing the change. The new courthouse was built at La Plata in 1896. It is one of those brick Victorian buildings with white trimmings and a square tower at one corner.

In spite of its complete lack of plan, La Plata is not blatantly ugly, it is like one of those careless, happy-go-lucky persons who are often the most lovable.

In the cozy law library of the courthouse, Judge Walter J. Mitchell talked to me about the great figures of Charles county in the past. Chief among them was General William Smallwood, who led the Maryland regiment to such good advantage during the American Revolution. He saved Washington's army at the Battle of Long Island, and was the General's good neighbor and friend. I made a pilgrimage to Smallwood's Retreat, his home, about ten miles from La Plata, and was saddened to discover that the charming little house had been allowed to fall into ruin. Washington used to come here to attend Masonic meetings. I am told that a fund is being raised to restore it. General Smallwood, who became Governor of Maryland after the Revolution, is buried nearby. In 1898 the Sons of the Revolution marked the spot with an immense block of granite. At Smallwood's funeral, one of his friends with his stick punched a hole in then ground at the head of the grave and dropped a walnut in it. The tree which sprang

up from this walnut, having been killed by lightening, was replaced by a new one.

On the way back from Smallwood's Retreat, I turned aside to have a look at Araby, largely on the account of its poetic name. George Washington refers to this early 18th century house as the home of the Widow Elbeck. Lovingly restored by its owners, Admiral and Mrs. Fletcher, this place has infinite charm. The interior woodwork so unique and most beautiful. The garden is said to contain a blue rambler rose, the only one in Maryland.

Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer, President of Maryland's Council of Safety during the Revolution and later a member of the Continental Congress, is another of Charles County's worthies. His house, Charleston, still stands with its notably tall chimneys on a hill overlooking Port Tobacco River. Judge Mitchell told me of a quaint old gentleman, Mr. Inglis Stuart, who had made it his life work to locate the graves of the Continental Congressmen. According to Mr. Stuart, all had been found but two: William Few of Georgia and Jenifer of Maryland. Mr. Stuart drives about the country in a taxicab to make his researches. He has succeeded in finding the grave of Colonel Few in Beacon, New York, and has had it marked. He believes that he has discovered Jenifer's resting place in a plowed field in Anne Arundel county, Maryland. The coffin and body have long ago returned to earth. What Mr. Stuart hopes to find in order to establish the spot is the coffin plate.

Perhaps I should interrupt myself here to explain Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer's odd name. It is an ancient custom in Maryland, when cousins bear the same name, for each to add his father's name. Nowadays its initial represents the father's name. Thus, we have John E. Hurst of W (William). There is an Atwood Blunt of B. (Bradley), and another Atwood Blunt of A. (Atwood). In the society columns of the Sun paper, the custom is religiously maintained as a bit of swank. On the islands of the Bay, however, at the other end of the social scale, there may be only three or four family names in an entire community, and it is a necessity to keep up the old custom; so we find John Claggett of Henry, and so forth.

Mulberry Grove, the home of John Hanson, President of the Continental Congress, is not far away. The Han-

sons and the Jenifers were connected by marriage. At the time of the Revolution the Hansons had already been settled in Charles County for more than a hundred years. In every generation they produced at least one outstanding man and in Maryland genealogy Hanson is a name to point to with pride. It was Miss Hanson who became the mother of Thomas Stone, another Signer, of whose house across the valley I shall presently speak.

In the narrow valley along the shore of its silted up river lies Port Tobacco, now a deserted village. There is nothing melancholy about the place, however, the sunshine is



Common in Charles County were curious structures with brick ends and clapboard sides.

so golden, the fields so rich, the woods so green; the whole earth is young and only the houses of men decayed. The place did not receive its name because of the thousands of hogsheads of tobacco it shipped. An Indian village stood here having a name which sounded like "Potobac" to the first white men. From that it was an easy transition to Port Tobacco. A little wing of the ancient courthouse that escaped the fire now serves as a Baptist Church, and on one side of what was the Courthouse Green three ancient houses of unusual interest stand close together. The largest, a two-story-and-a-half frame building with an extraordinary double chimney pierced by four little windows is not undergoing restoration, for better or worse, next to it stands a little gambrel roofed house which has been there so long it seems to have grown out of the grounds, and next to that a tiny, cockeyed, frame house with a heavy list to port. They have no history.

From the valley may be seen the steeple of St. Ignatius' church, to which is joined the old manor-house of St. Thomas'. This manor was taken up by the Jesuits in 1649 under the same conditions that applied to other settlers, since Cecil, Lord Baltimore, was opposed to granting ecclesiastics, even those of his own faith, any special privi-

leges. By the rules of their own order, the Jesuits were forbidden to hold land and the manor was registered in the name of Thomas Matthews as trustee. The present church, on the site of an older chapel, dates from 1789, the manor-house from 1741. They had to be built together in the first place to evade the law, which, from William and Mary's time to the Revolution, forbade public places of worship to the Catholics. The manor-house, with its commanding view of the Potomac, was considered so grand that Father George Hunter, who built it, was rebuked by his fellow Jesuits for putting up a "palace." For a hundred-and-seventy years this was the headquarters of the Jesuit's order. Repairs made from time to time somewhat mar the venerable simplicity of the buildings.

On the hill which rises above the right bank of the little river stands Rose Hill, with a magnificent view down the Port Tobacco River to the faraway Potomac. Rose Hill is said to possess the finest boxwood garden in Maryland, and I have seen none finer. There is bigger box at Cross Manor and elsewhere, and many plantings more extensive in area, but the box at Rose Hill is all there just as it was planted. The frosts and the storms of two-hundred years have not destroyed a single bush. It is most lovely in its irregularity and its vigorous health. The scent of it in the hot sunshine is delicious.

The house is one of those curious structures common in Charles County, with brick ends and clapboard sides. There is a main block with two separate structures connected to the center by enclosed galleries. Like the other buildings of its period, 1730, it is exactly regular and very plain except for its delicate ornamental woodwork, sparsely used. The present owners, Captain and Mrs. Carlos Grevemberg, are slowly restoring it. It was once the home of Dr. Gustavus Brown, one of the physicians who attended Washington in his last illness. Dr. Brown is buried in a lonely tomb on the hillside below the box garden.

Another of Washington's physicians and his boyhood friend, the famous Dr. James Craik, built a house on the outskirts of what has become La Plata, and called it La Grange. Its similarity in design to Rose Hill suggests that it was copied from the older house.

Next door to Rose Hill is Habre de Venture, unique among the old houses of Maryland, for here the hip-roofed central block with its two little wings and connecting galleries are built in the form of a crescent. Nor do the two things balance each other; or has two stories with a peaked roof and brick ends; the other story and a half with hip roof and all four sides clapboarded. Perhaps changes have been made since the house was first built, but there is something very engaging in the little house's irregularity, and it seems better to express the character of Southern

Maryland which, nowadays anyhow, is certainly not formal. Habre de Venture contains a parlor of great elegance. The original paneling, now in the Baltimore Museum of Art, has been replaced by a good replica. The gallery connecting with the kitchen wings contains a breakfast-room having a quaint fireplace with a breast retreating into the wall. This house was built by Thomas Stone, one of the Maryland Signers, who is buried in the place. The present owner, Mr. Charles Stephenson Smith, who has embraced Maryland wholeheartedly, takes his pleasure in restoring the place little by little without making it look like a multimillionaire's weekend lodge.

The plain old houses of Charles County, with their delicate woodwork, have a special attraction for me. There is Hard Bargain, now fallen into disrepair, whose rich, time-darkened bricks and faded shutters make an exquisite harmony of color. There is a story to account for its odd name, of course, one of the charming, pointless anecdotes characteristic of my country. Gwynn Harris and his brother Tom were hot rivals for the hand of Kitty Root. Gwynn won out, and during the marriage breakfast, in an expansive moment, offered to build Tom a fine house if he would kiss Kitty. Tom kissed Kitty and Gwynn built the house, but whose was the "Hard Bargain" does not appear.

There is Mount Republic which architects rave over. This is a later house, 1792, but it has not broken out into the opulence of style which characterizes His Lordship's Kindness, say, or Belair. The woodwork is exquisite. The two arched-entrance doorways with their side-lights and fan-lights are a joy to the heart. Mount Republic has its story, too. Once it was owned by Francis Weems, who maintained a pack of a hundred foxhounds and kept a poker game going for forty years! There were fifty barrels of brandy and fine wines in his cellar; he gave parties three times a week and was called the "King Entertainer" which seems no more than his due.

Which brings to mind another house in this neighborhood, Mount Victoria, a huge structure on a rolling hill with a superb view over rich fields to the distant Potomac. Built in 1905, it has no architectural pretensions, but it was the home of the late Robert Crain, a magnificent party-giver of a later generation, and a name to conjure with in Southern Maryland. Mr. Crain died in 1928 but certain of his neighbors still talk about the wonderful parties he gave at Mount Victoria. My only regret is that I was never invited to join in the fun.

