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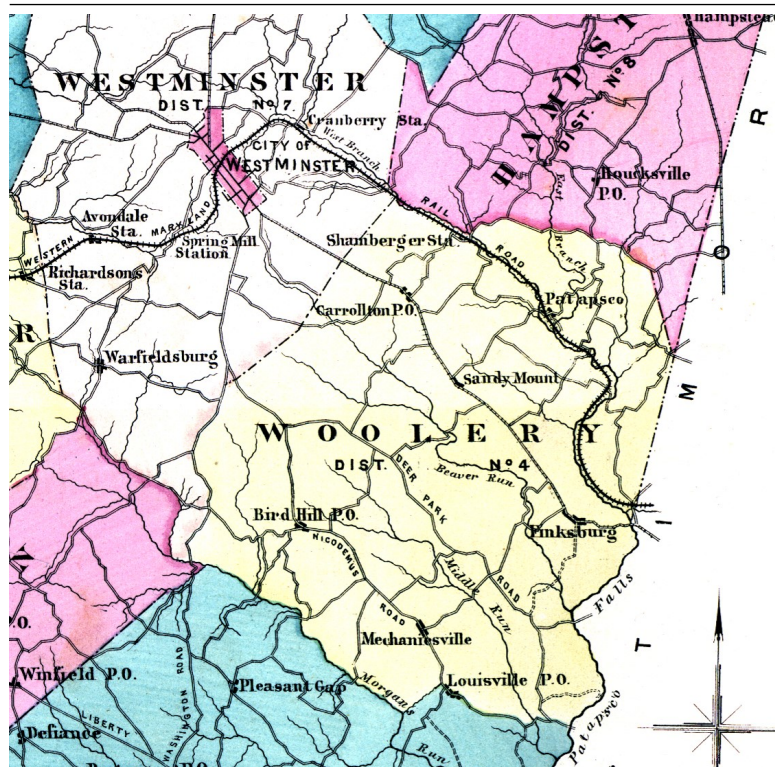
== THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CARROLL COUNTY, MD, INC. ==

FORGOTTEN FINKSBURG: ON THE HIGHWAY FROM EVERYWHERE TO NOWHERE

By FRANK J. BATAVICK

As you exit the rear of the Jiffy Mart on Route 140 in Finksburg and make a right on Old Westminster Pike, you go only four-tenths of a mile before a dead end directs you to turn on Cedarhurst Road to resume travel on Route 140. Along the way, you pass well-cared-for residences standing alongside derelict houses and buildings that hint they once were stores. Mt. Zion United Methodist Church rises on a knoll to the right. Few realize this modest outcropping of buildings is a chapter of Finksburg's slowly fading past.

Travelers along Route 140 through Finksburg may be forgiven for thinking the town is no more than a dreary succession of collision-repair shops and strip shopping centers with an adult store, tattoo parlor, two trailer parks, a pawn and gun shop, and a prestigious private school thrown in to flavor the mélange. They also might note that the highway is blighted by the greatest concentration of billboards in the county. None of this indicates that cross streets branch off into leafy housing developments, one of which is a favorite of Baltimore Ravens players whose home values easily top a million dollars. Nor do motorists know that the large microwave tower they pass at Suffolk Road marks a top-secret National Security Agency facility that is partially underground and charged with encrypting and protecting communications for the agency.



Detail of the 1877 map of Carroll County showing the Woolery District and Finksburg. (HSCC collection.)

Beginnings

The real story lies elsewhere. As with many other small towns, Finksburg owes its origin to the potent alchemy of mixing a busy road with a tavern. The Old Westminster Pike is first identified on ancient maps as an American Indian hunting and trading path leading from Shawan Road in Baltimore County to a trading post

established by John "Hance" Steelman in 1727 outside Union Bridge. But even before that, bands of Patapsco, Powhatan, and Susquehannocks frequented the north branch of the Patapsco River, attracted by the nearby quartz deposits used to make arrowheads and spear points. When European colonists arrived, they widened the path into a wagon route from Reisterstown to Westminster and beyond.

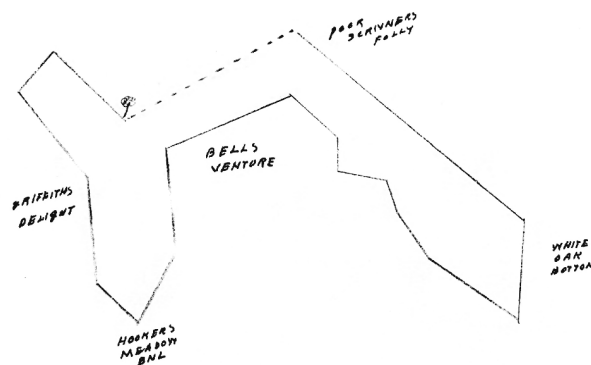
Settlers wishing to carve out new lives in the wilderness had formidable challenges, perhaps reflected in some of the fanciful names given to local land tracts: "Stains Neglect," "I Will I Will Not," "Vexation," and "Steven's Folly." On May 22, 1750, Thomas Hooker received a patent for 181 acres he called "Hooker's Meadow." His land grant was in the vicinity of today's Finksburg Shopping Center and Beth Jacobs Cemetery on Route 140. With a 1763 resurvey, Hooker grew his holdings by 280 acres, calling the new tract "Hooker's Meadow Enlarged."

The area had abundant natural resources with Deep Run, Middle Run, Beaver Run, and the northern branch of the Patapsco River providing waterpower for mills and manufacturing. These features and the countryside's rolling hills crowded with dense forests attracted settlers with names still prominent today, including the Stockdales, Garners, Gorsuches, Shipleys, Barneses, Cockeys, Finks, Leisters, Zepps, Armacosts, Conaways, and Woolerys. As testimony to their pioneering spirit, their names are found on greater Finksburg's roads and businesses. Even its election district, District 4, is called Woolery, having nothing to do with the sheep industry, as some believe.

Age of the Turnpike

As commercial traffic grew along that narrow American Indian path turned wagon road, travelers were bedeviled by rutted and muddy conditions. Maryland's General Assembly responded in January 1805 by authorizing the incorporation of the Baltimore and Reisterstown Turnpike Company, created "for making a turnpike road from Baltimore, through Reisterstown, to the Pennsylvania line towards Hanover town, and through Westminster to the

HOOKER'S MEADOW
PATENTED TO THOMAS HOOKER 5/22/1750-181A
HOOKER'S MEADOW'S ENL. 7/27/1763-461A IS A RES. ON THIS
MANOR OF BALTIMORE



Plat researched by Arthur Tracey showing land surveys prior to Finksburg's founding. (HSCC Collection)

Pennsylvania line towards Petersburg" [now Littlestown]. To cross the north branch of the Patapsco River, the company built a stone bridge in 1806. Using prison labor from Baltimore, builders reached Littlestown by November 16, 1807, spurring development all along the route.

John Shorb sold 11 acres of "Hookers Meadow Enlarged" to Adam Fink on February 5, 1802. Not much is known about Fink, not even the dates of his birth and death. The surname is derived from the German word for finch, or small bird. An Adam Fink and a second adult, presumably his wife, are shown living in Frederick, Maryland, in the 1790 federal census. The 1810 census lists an "Adam Fink" and eight household members living in the "Delaware Upper Hundred Balto County," which places them in the region of today's Finksburg.

Fink built the first house in the area and opened a tavern on the northeast side of the wagon road. It became a toll road in 1806-1807, with the 20-mile marker to and from Baltimore in Finksburg. The new tavern benefitted by being another stop for hydrating horses and travelers. Fink added to his holdings on September 13, 1808, when Samuel Hooker sold him another acre, followed by an additional 1¼ acres on May 19, 1810. The original tavern is long gone, and its exact location unknown.

In 1813, Fink hired a Mr. Quigley, a contractor for Pennsylvania's Chambersburg turnpike, to lay out a town on the acres he had accumulated. Quigley is credited with naming the area Finksburg since it was Fink who owned the only house on the property.

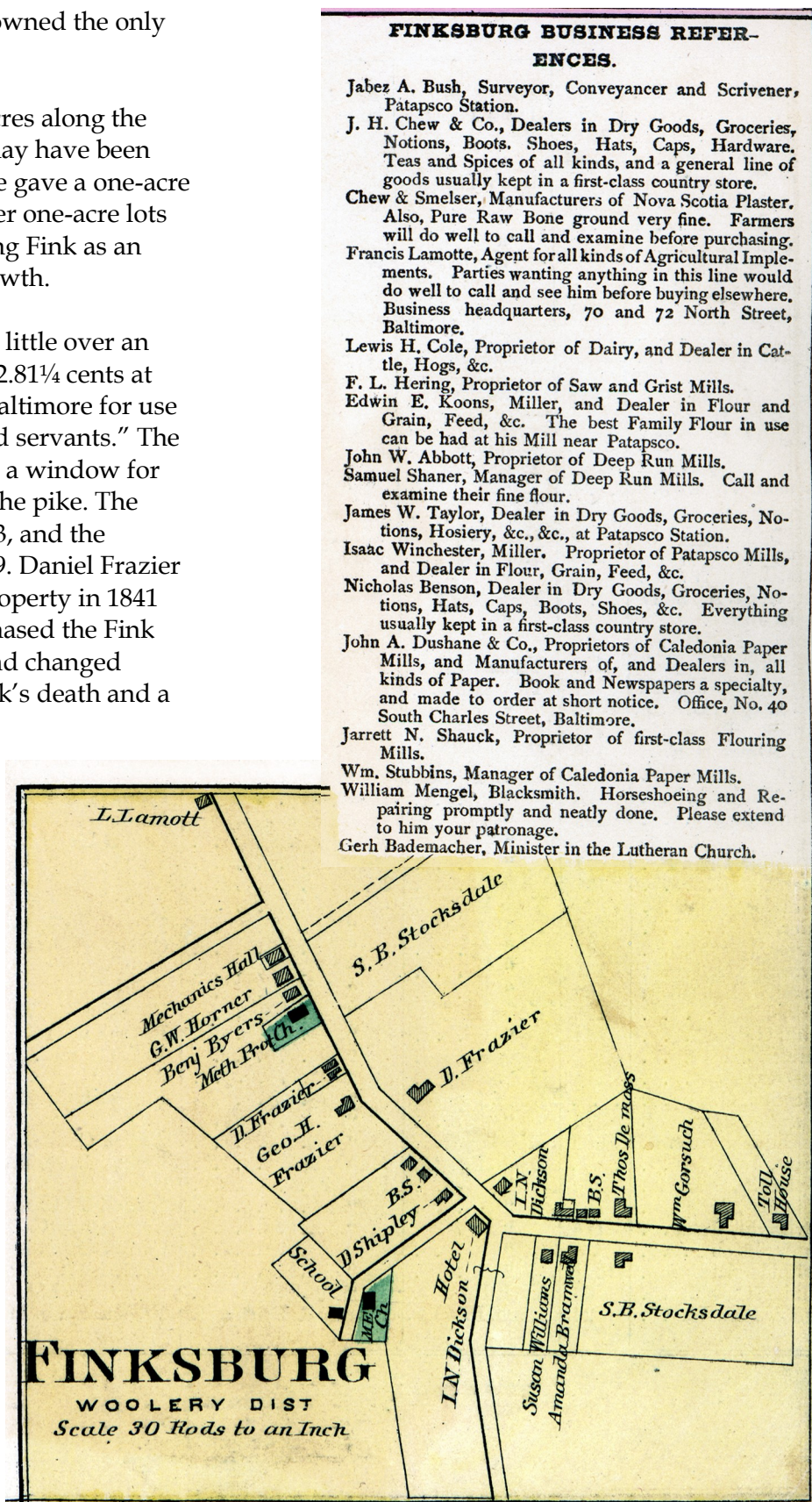
Samuel Wheeler purchased 104 acres along the turnpike in 1810 and built what may have been the second house in Finksburg. He gave a one-acre lot to his son and sold several other one-acre lots over the next ten years, thus joining Fink as an important factor in the town's growth.

The turnpike company acquired a little over an acre from Wheeler in 1821 for \$112.81¼ cents at the "twentieth mile stone" from Baltimore for use by "the Gate keeper his family and servants." The small home constructed there had a window for collecting tolls on the side facing the pike. The company owned this lot until 1903, and the tollhouse itself survived until 2009. Daniel Frazier bought a parcel south of Fink's property in 1841 and steadily added to it. He purchased the Fink Tavern property in 1854 after it had changed hands several times following Fink's death and a sale by trustees in 1845.

Small Town Life

The arrival of the turnpike in 1806 spurred the development of a commercial center that included a blacksmith shop helmed by Samuel Hughes, a general store run by Thomas Ward, and even a school. Westminster attorney, Charles W. Webster, began teaching students in 1831 in a log schoolhouse. To recruit pupils of all ages, he ran an advertisement in the September 5, 1833, edition of the *Carrolltonian* for a night school starting on "Monday night the 28th Sept. School hours 6 until 9 o'clock & the scholars to furnish their own light and fuel. Terms: R, W & Arithmetic per qt. \$2.00; English Grammar per qt.

Town map from *An Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County, Maryland*, 1877. Note the "Toll House" far right and two blacksmith shops labeled "B.S." (HSCC Collection)



\$2.50; Mathematics per qt. \$5.00.” Finksburg did not receive its first post office until 1857 with the appointment of postmaster A. L. Hoover, earning \$63.60 a year. Though the country was not engaged in military conflict at the time, about 20 men formed a mini militia, the Finksburg Rifles, in 1838.

The Western Maryland Rail Road Company reached the Finksburg area in 1855. The tracks from Glyndon, Baltimore County hugged the north shore of the Patapsco River, placing the station a good mile from the old town center. This stymied growth, as shown by the 1877 *Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County*. Though the map of Finksburg indicates two blacksmith shops and a hotel – necessary assets for turnpike travelers – most other businesses noted in an accompanying list were located outside the original town plat. Seven of them were mills for flour, grain, feed, bone meal, timber, and paper, requiring the waterpower of the Patapsco River. They also benefitted from the adjacent railhead. The list notes only six businesses most likely within or near the town limits: two dry goods stores, a blacksmith, an “agricultural implement” firm with an office in Baltimore, a cattle and hog dealer, and a Lutheran minister. The last is a bit of an anomaly, given that the map shows only two Methodist churches.

The railroad promoted regional growth because farmers could more easily transport produce and milled grain to Baltimore’s markets. The *Carroll County Maryland Directory* of 1878 claimed local farms had “yields to the acre 30 bushels of wheat, 50 to 60 bushels of oats, 200 to 300 potatoes, 50 bushels of corn and 2 to 3 tons of hay. There is more milk shipped to Baltimore from this station than any other on the Western Maryland Railroad.”

The Independent Order of Mechanics built a meeting hall in 1872 in Finksburg, and the Alpha Farmer’s Club was organized in 1873 to provide crop information and exchanges. L.A. Lamotte ran a corn canning operation in 1888. Baseball was the most popular sport in the 1880s, and the Star of Finksburg team regularly battled players from Westminster, Taneytown, and Frizzellburg. The town boasted a literary society “for the instruction

and entertainment of the populace,” and five cents bought admission to Friday night lectures in Mechanics Hall by then well-known writers. Finksburg received electricity in 1925 when a line from Reisterstown was extended.

Northwest of Finksburg’s town center, worshippers built a Methodist Protestant (M.P.) Church in Sandymount. Five trustees purchased land in 1827 out of the “Elizabeth’s Fancy” tract and erected a log church after years of worshippers meeting in homes and barns. The congregation is considered the first M.P. Church in the county and one of the oldest in the United States. A marker outside today’s church notes local families helped erect it in 1867 by gathering field stones. A bell and belfry were added in the 1890s, an education wing in 1958, and a contemporary sanctuary in 1974.

In 1855, the church was riven by the issue of whether slaves should be permitted to worship with their masters. The trustees refused, and a group broke away to build the Pleasant Grove Methodist Episcopal Church 3/10th of a mile away on the other side of the pike. The three stone masons who constructed it in 1856 later built the new stone church at Sandymount. In 1943 the two congregations reconciled and now worship as one at the Sandymount Church. The Pleasant Grove Church has since been converted to a private residence.

In the midst of the old town, there’s the imposing red brick Mt. Zion United Methodist Church with



Pleasant Grove M.E. Church, 1943. (HSCC Collection)

a center tower. Built in 1896-7, it replaced an 1856 one-story brick structure that once stood opposite it across the pike. Ed Armacost recalled, "My Dad, with a six-horse team, hauled all the stone for that foundation from down in the valley. And then with a four-horse team, he hauled all the brick for the church from Westminster." In the 1950s, Route 140's construction separated the church from its cemetery, now located across the busy highway. Samuel Stansbury, keeper of the toll gate from 1868 to 1887, is buried there.

Before the arrival of strip shopping centers and suburban sprawl, life in the village was seen as idyllic. Longtime resident and horsewoman Carol Hackney remembered when "there were dirt roads, no traffic lights" and "sheep grazed in the pasture that became the Finksburg Shopping Center." Peach orchards covered the land now occupied by a trailer park.



Above: Undated photo of "The Elms" manor house, demolished 1954. (HSCC Collection)

Below: Undated photo of "Cold Saturday" manor house. (HSCC Collection)



Nearby Historic Houses

The Greater Finksburg area was home to two grand manor houses and plantations. Only one survives. From 1775-1780, John Beall of "Beall's Venture" constructed a two-and-a-half story manse, on the banks of the north branch of the Patapsco River. It was on the left on Route 140 north, after it crosses the bridge into Carroll County. Surviving photos reveal that the house was built of fieldstone coated with white stucco and had a main block with a kitchen and service wing, showing the influence of Tidewater Maryland. When the turnpike from Baltimore came through and replaced the old "Rolling Road," the rear of the house faced the toll road. Porches and verandas were added to the building, transforming the rear to a front entrance. A winding driveway was built, lined with elm trees, and the manse became known as "The Elms."

"The Elms" was notable as the home of Francis Scott Key, Jr., from 1839-1848. The "gentleman farmer" Key and his wife, Elizabeth Lloyd Harwood of the prominent Annapolis Harwoods, entertained lavishly, inviting "the beaux and belles of Baltimore and the country surrounding," as noted in a 1906 issue of *Maryland Monthly Magazine*. Key's famous father was once "confined to his bed in consequence of illness, in the neighborhood of Westminster," according to a letter his son wrote to one of his father's clients. The Keys apparently spent beyond their means. A title search revealed that the Chesapeake Bank of Baltimore went to Chancery Court in 1843 to collect unpaid mortgage debt in the amount of \$4,587.16. The couple persisted there until 1846 when Elizabeth finally paid their debts, using money from her father's estate. Their financial difficulties apparently continued because the property ended up in the hands of trustees in 1848.

The house and acreage passed through many hands and were eventually purchased by Baltimore City in 1944 to make way for Liberty Reservoir, and in 1954 Mr. and Mrs. George B. Taylor bought the home for just \$125 before it was razed. Over the next six months, friends and neighbors helped them remove its hand-crafted

trim, doors, mantelpieces, tongue and groove floorboards, iron work, and even fireplace bricks. The Taylors incorporated the contents into a new, pared-down version of “The Elms” they built in Glyndon in 1958.

The other Finksburg area manor house is “Cold Saturday,” built in 1785 and located off Route 91, about three-quarters of a mile southwest of town. The house’s exterior of coursed, irregular stones achieves elegance, with a portico and doorway graced with exquisite fan lights and sidelights set within flanking pilasters. According to Carol Hackney, who grew up there, the property was originally called Clover Hill Farm. When her family bought it in 1932, they decided to call it Cold Saturday, adopting this name from an old land grant, famously labelled by King George III in 1765. On Saturday, January 12 of that year, his survey team had written him complaining about the snow and bitterly cold weather that impeded their progress. When they eventually surveyed the tract, the king whimsically named it “Cold Saturday.”

Scharf’s 1881 *History of Western Maryland* describes the original Clover Hill as an “elegant farm,” owned by Lewis H. Cole. By 1940, Cold Saturday had earned renown as an award-winning angus cattle farm, with stock exports as far afield as the U.S. Virgin Islands, and in 1983, the U.S. Olympic equestrian team chose the farm as its training facility for the upcoming Olympics. The house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2008 and today it is a popular venue for weddings and special events.

Digging for Copper

Eons ago temperature and pressure on the deep ocean floor caused sediment to metamorphose into a compact and highly crystalline rock known as banded-iron. It can be found along a narrow, 10-mile belt that courses northeast from Sykesville to Finksburg and is composed of magnetite, quartz, and copper-bearing chalcopyrite with minor amounts of zinc, cobalt, and nickel.

As early as 1750, English miners opened a copper mine and furnace in the Deer Park area of the

Woolery district south of Louisville, now known as Mineral Hill. Attention turned to “The Elms” property in 1848 when Samuel Wildesen purchased all 370 acres of the estate for mining purposes. The next year he sold it to Edward Remington who organized a group of investors from Philadelphia and established the Patapsco Mining Company with sites on both sides of the turnpike. The 1850 census lists six “miners,” but eventually the company employed at least a dozen immigrants from Ireland and Cornwall, England. While mining iron and copper ore, they discovered veins containing cobalt along with a new variant mineral dubbed “carrollite,” a compound of copper and cobalt named after the county. Because carrollite was found in such small quantities, it had no practical use, but the cobalt was quite valuable. When made into an oxide, silicate, or carbonate, it gives a deep blue color to glass, ceramics, inks, and paints.

Investors reorganized in 1852 to form the Patapsco Copper & Cobalt Mining Company but made the risky decision to build on-site furnaces for the cobalt ore, rather than shipping it to Baltimore for smelting. The quantity of the ore proved insufficient, and the financial Panic of 1857 compounded difficulties. To raise capital, the group sold “The Elms” estate in 1860 to Baltimore businessmen Elias Glenn Perine and William S. Rayner. They issued a prospectus in 1862 featuring a “Map of the Elms Farm containing the Mineral Lands of the Maryland Copper Co. of



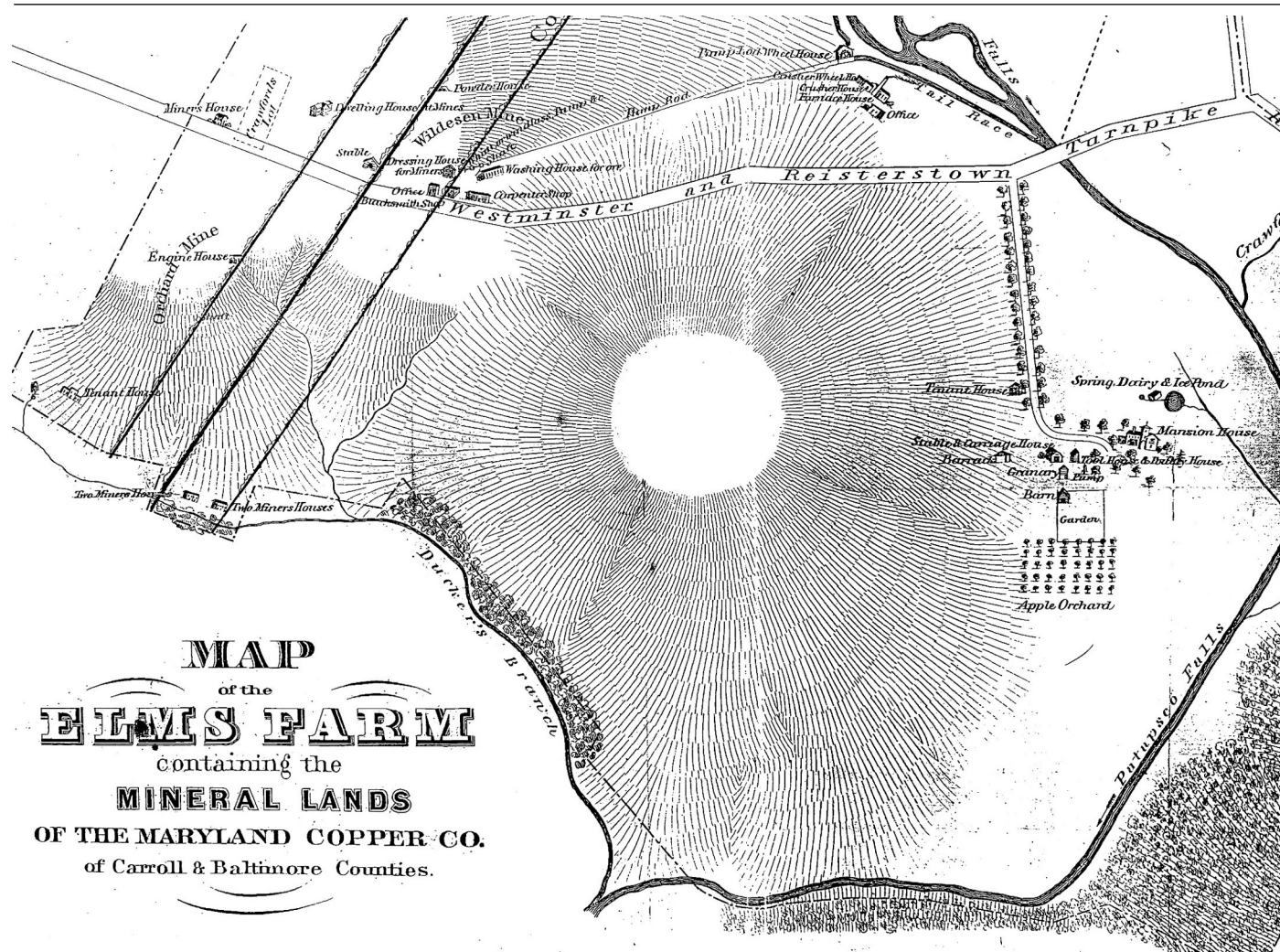
Mordecai B. Stocksdale’s blacksmith shop, Finksburg, c.1876. (HSCC Collection)

Carroll & Baltimore Counties." It shows necessary equipment like a pump rod wheelhouse, a crusher wheelhouse, and a furnace house and identifies the location of three copper veins. The mine north of the turnpike was reportedly 365 feet deep with levels at 100 and 160 feet deep and stretching some 600 feet. These shafts would have consequences for the future construction of Route 140 in the 1950s: A Caterpillar D9 bulldozer fell some 20 feet into a collapsed 90-foot mine shaft, and deep fill was required to ensure a stable highway base.

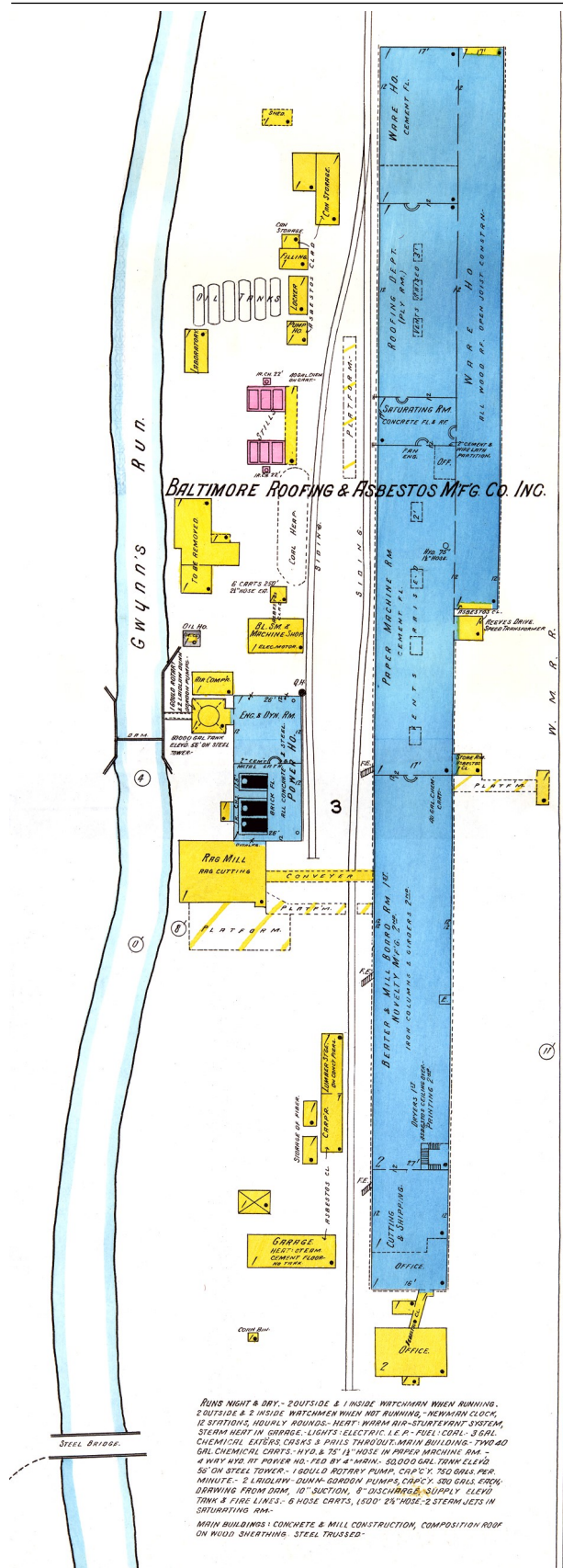
To support mining operations in the Deer Park area, investors incorporated the Mechanicsville and Finksburg Turnpike on April 9, 1870. Mechanicsville was the name of today's Gamber, and the Mineral Hill Mining Company south of town was among the highway's original

subscribers. The new toll road ran northeast a little over three miles from what is now Sykesville Road northwest of Gamber, across Kay's Mill Road, and then by Hughes Road to Route 91, connecting to Old Westminster Pike. Teamsters, driving wagons pulled by oxen, mules, and sometimes as many as eight horses, required the pike's stable road base for transporting iron ore to the Finksburg rail depot. The pike was also used to ship silicon dioxide, more commonly known as quartz, to the Maryland Silicate Mills northeast of town in Cedarhurst near the railroad. The pulverized stone was used for the manufacturing of pottery, sandpaper, scouring soaps, and filler products. Bankruptcy closed the mill in December 1910.

The privately-operated Baltimore-Reisterstown Turnpike that had moved people, animals, crops,



Detail from "Map of the Elms Farm." "Mansion House" is at 3 o'clock, and the three upper left diagonal lines denote copper veins. (Public domain)



The Baltimore Roofing & Asbestos Company was located between the Western Maryland Railroad and Gwynn's Run. The 1918 Sanborn map shows its location as Asbestos, 10 miles east of Westminster. (HSCC collection)

ores, and other products across the Woolery District since the early 1800s had declined by 1900. The State Roads Commission bought the Westminster branch in 1915 for \$1,350 per mile, absorbing it into the state road system.

The Lure of River and Rail

New industries continued to blossom close to the railhead. The Oldetyme Distilling Corporation operated in Cedarhurst, where it made and bottled Three Feathers Rye. Schenley Import Corporation acquired the brand in 1940, and in 1941 began producing industrial alcohol for munitions to support the war effort. The company later moved the business out-of-state. By 1913, the Baltimore Roofing and Asbestos Manufacturing Company had a large factory nearby, producing fireproof roof and wall shingles, corrugated wall and roof panels, and decorative wall and ceiling moldings that were a composite of Portland cement reinforced with asbestos fibers. The company tried to change the Finksburg rail station name to Asbestos for advertising purposes, and this name appears on a 1918 Sanborn map, but locals fought back. Mordecai B. Stockdale complained in a letter to the editor that you wouldn't "change the name of Baltimore to Oysterville" for a local industry. The company relented, but instead of the depot's name reverting to "Finksburg," it more accurately became "Cedarhurst." The plant closed in 1920, and the Congoleum Company purchased it the next year to manufacture rolls of felt backing used in the production of floor coverings, a business that continues today.

Serving a Thirsty Baltimore

In 1931 the state authorized Baltimore officials to establish lakes and reservoirs in the Patapsco River valley basin to create a dependable water supply for the city. Legislation gave Baltimore almost unlimited authority to acquire land and remove stores, mills, farms, churches and other buildings that stood in the way of what became Liberty Reservoir. The city completed

Liberty Dam in 1953, and it took 15 months for the backed-up water to form the reservoir that is 8 miles long with a shoreline of 82 miles. Its 43 billion gallons of water inundated 5,700 acres of Carroll County land, including prime riverfront property in Finksburg.

The Center of Gravity Shifts

The old town of Finksburg persisted until the 1954 construction of Route 140, which cut it off from easy access to the railroad and demolished some properties. The once-busy turnpike became a back road and the town's core never recovered.

Over time, the county has attempted to address Finksburg's development issues. In 1964, community surveys, public meetings, and consultants helped develop the "Master Plan of Carroll County." It targeted the Finksburg area "for major growth, following only Westminster and Freedom District in the expected residential and industrial expansion." Carroll County commissioners dedicated a 30-acre industrial park in 1972, soon supplemented by an additional one. Industries include two asphalt plants, with C.J. Miller alone producing 300,000 tons a year.

The master plan was reviewed and revised in 1981 and 2010. In 2013, the commissioners adopted the Finksburg Corridor plan for the area along Route 140 from the Baltimore County line to Kays Mill Road. Among their goals was "to establish a visually appealing Gateway that welcomes residents and visitors to Carroll County." This became a delicate balancing act between encouraging small-scale businesses and having to tolerate what they sell and how they use signage.

Meanwhile, others in the old town were concerned with preserving its historical heritage. Citizens formed the Finksburg Planning and Community Council to assist with the implementation of the master plan, and the Maryland Historical Trust conducted a survey of the town's historic properties in 1979. The Carroll County Department of Planning and Development's Historical Resource Survey continued the work in 1984.



Aerial view of Liberty Dam and watershed, October 1960.
(HSCC Collection)

These efforts all came to naught. The amended 2013 master plan bemoaned the old town's failure to become a National Register Historic District like New Windsor or Uniontown. No champion had emerged to even proceed with an application. The plan notes that since 1985, "major context- and character-defining buildings such as the toll house and hotel have been demolished. Other remaining structures from the village core have continued to be modified and threatened by demolition and/or neglect. In November 2010, Maryland Historic Trust indicated that due to the loss of integrity, the village of Finksburg is no longer eligible for inclusion on the National Register."

In June of this year, Carroll County commissioners partially funded the recently created Finksburg Facade Improvement Program with a grant of \$103,839.31. Clare Stewart, a comprehensive planner for the county, announced, "This program is to encourage façade and sign improvements and renovations along the 140 corridor, one of our gateways into the county." Business or property owners interested in improving store fronts in the designated area will be reimbursed for half of the total cost.

The grant may improve the view along Route 140, but this only adds more grim irony to the saga of the village of Finksburg. Once birthed by a highway, the old town has been hollowed out and destroyed by a successor highway. Old Finksburg's few remaining residents are reminded of this every day as they hear the thrum of traffic

on Route 140. More than 55,000 vehicles a day pass by within earshot of a ghostly town that has withered and all but died.

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Feed store and Peltzer's barber shop, July 2021.
(Author's photo)

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I am deeply indebted to Ann Horvath and her late husband George for generously providing some of the research for this article. Ann's paternal grandfather managed "The Elms" farm during the 1930s, and his family of 10 children lived in the tenant house.

About the Author: Frank Batavick's television production career spans over 40 years, including 16 at Maryland Public TV. He has also served as adjunct faculty and visiting lecturer in Communications at colleges and universities in New York and Maryland, most recently at McDaniel. He is a co-founder of New Windsor Heritage and is a member and past chair of HSCC's board of trustees.

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The Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland, Inc.
210 East Main Street
Westminster, Maryland 21157
Phone: 410-848-6494
Email: Info@HSCCmd.org Website: www.HSCCmd.org



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