

Baltimore's Development Key to Privy Digging

By Andy Goldfrank

*The October issue of the **Baltimore Bottle Digger**, contained excerpts from **Andy Goldfrank's** article, "The Frustrations (and Joys) of Baltimore Privy Digging," which had originally appeared in **The Potomac Pontil**. In this issue, we are presenting Andy's brief history of Baltimore's development and how it enabled diggers to hone in on the most likely areas to find the torpedoes and tenpins described in last month's article.*

The future site of the City of Baltimore was a natural harbor on the Chesapeake Bay with a number of potential mill sites on the streams dropping over the fall line. Baltimore County's tobacco growers anxious to have a conveniently located customs house, along with farmers bringing cereal crops to the grinding mills built on these shores, were impatient with requirements that made them carry their goods to previously established ports. These landowners petitioned Maryland's governor for a customs house, and "Baltimore Town" was officially created by an act of the Maryland Colonial Assembly on 1729, and 60 acres were surveyed in 1730. Local entrepreneurs, conscious

of northern Maryland's and southern Pennsylvania's grain fields, took advantage of Baltimore's swift-flowing streams, a rarity in coastal Maryland. Shipwrights and merchants, preparing to carry flour milled on Jones Falls and Gwynns Falls to the distant reaches of the British Empire, settled along the fringes of the harbor. By 1768, the town had grown large enough to become the seat of Baltimore County.

In 1773, Fell's Point was annexed by Baltimore Town situated around the inner basin. These communities were incorporated as Baltimore City along with Jonestown to the west in 1797. Jonestown goes back to the late 17th century, when David Jones founded a settlement adjacent to his mill on Jones Falls. Jonestown was incorporated as a community distinct from its neighbors, Baltimore Town and Fell's Point, comprising an area bound by Front Street, High Street and the Jones Falls on down to about Pratt Street. While Baltimore Town and Fells Point were busy port centers, Jonestown was a residential area for the wealthiest people of the era who desired a life away from the hustle and bustle. In contrast, with deep water almost to its shoreline, Fell's Point from the beginning was a magnet

for trade. It served as the original Port of Baltimore for over a hundred years, since the inner harbor basin was too shallow for ocean-going vessels. At the beginning of the 19th century, with immigration and economic growth, the population of Baltimore grew in both numbers and wealth. Baltimore played a crucial role in the War of 1812, when soldiers, stationed at Fort McHenry, successfully held off a British attack on Baltimore. (That victory for Baltimore was commemorated in a poem by Francis Scott Key, which is familiar to all as our national anthem.). When the war ended in early 1815, the city was unscathed and Baltimoreans resumed their vigorous foreign trade efforts.

During this period, a large annexation of land was authorized, bringing the total acreage of Baltimore to 8,448.

The Board of Commissioners employed Thomas H. Poppleton "to survey the new boundaries, lay out streets in the annexed territory, select lots for public uses, and harmonize street names." His

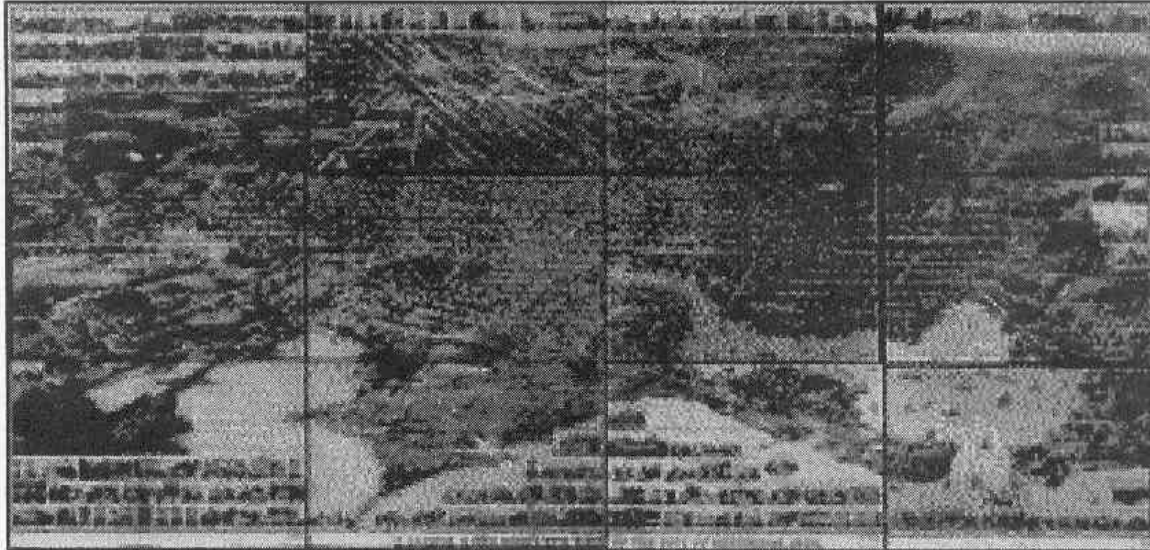
assignment from the Board dictated that the layout of the old part of the City was not to be changed; therefore, this section was mapped as is shown on his 1823 rendering. (Poppleton's suggestions for the development of Baltimore were followed quite closely during the next seventy years until a subsequent annexation in 1888.).

By 1825, there was some 60 flour mills within a few miles of center city, as Baltimore became the second largest municipality in the United States. However, the frontier was pushing beyond the Appalachians into the vast and rich farmlands of western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri, threatening to leave Baltimore behind in its economic wake. Other ports were already making efforts to connect with the West: New York completed the Erie Canal in 1825, Philadelphia was organizing what would become the Pennsylvania Railroad, and even smaller cities like Richmond and Charleston were reaching westward. The State of Maryland concentrated its efforts on completing the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal, designed to link the Potomac and Ohio River valleys, but Baltimore supported an overland link in the form of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad ("B&O"). Although the two competed



for routes and freight, to the eventual ruin of the canal and the financial embarrassment of the state, Baltimore's railroad reached Cumberland in 1842 and Ohio shortly thereafter.

Baltimore owed much of its early growth and prosperity to its desirable East Coast location situated between the agricultural riches of the South and the industry of the North. The addition of the B&O contributed by linking the rich farmlands of the West to a major Atlantic port that was further inland (and westward) than any other on the seaboard thereby attracting merchant shippers to Baltimore's harbor from around the nation and the world, in addition to the regional shipping throughout the rivers of Maryland and



Virginia. By 1850, the City's population was over 169,000, with only New York having more people, and greater than the combined populations of the number 8, 9 and 10 cities (including St. Louis and Albany). (See "Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the United States: 1790 to 1990" at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027.html>).

Long considered a southern town, during the Civil War Baltimore was occupied by federal troops (who also seized the railroads and occupied Annapolis) to keep Maryland in the Union and to prevent Washington D.C. from being surrounded by Confederate states. The end of the Civil War found Baltimore suffering nearly as much as the cities of the former Confederacy. The collapse of the South's economy naturally affected one of its leading ports of entry, as did the loss of many vessels during the war. The city gradually recovered helped by an influx of displaced Southerners, as well as by the tremendous amount of grain which the B&O brought to port from the West.

Although the story of Baltimore does not end in the early 1870s, for me there is no point to going much further since my focus is finding another "Torpedo

Alley." It is known that by 1888, Baltimore contained nearly 80,000 houses almost all of brick -- the vast majority of which were built before 1870. In the intervening years from 1860s to the present day, Baltimore has continued to show economic growth, however, the city has declined in population in the most recent last decades. As a consequence, the city retains many of its 18th and 19th century structures and provides plenty of opportunity for dedicated bottle diggers.

Typical development, during the period when torpedoes and tenpins would have been used, occurred on the perimeter of the city, such as to the west of roughly where Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard is located, to the north of Fell's Point in Butcher's Hill, and in areas

just east of the present day Patterson Park. For example, frame and brick houses of farmers and workers dotted Preston, Biddle, and Ross (now Druid Hill) before 1840; however, early urban housing was not built

along Preston, Biddle, and Pennsylvania until the 1850s and along Dolphin until the 1860s. All over the city, developers eager to build housing as densely as possible, marketed three-story brick row houses to city merchants on large main street building lots with narrow twelve feet-wide alley homes (brick and frame shanties) behind these main streets. Slaves along with white and free black servants-drivers, stable men, and domestic workers-lived on the network of back streets.

The physical development of the city's structures is well represented on the Poppleton's Survey of 1823 (discussed above), the Sidney & Neff Plan of the City of Baltimore from about 1851, and E. Sachse, & Co.'s Bird's Eye View of the City of Baltimore dated 1869. The Poppleton Survey and Sachse Bird's Eye View are available on the Internet at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/finder.html> and <http://www.mdhs.org/library/MappingMD/rm4.html> with a little effort. These maps are a boon to diggers who use them to identify areas likely to have privies containing bottles from the 1860s or earlier.

However, knowing where to dig a privy does not create a certainty that one will find old bottles or even any bottles at all.