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BALTIMORE 1783 to 1797:
A STUDY IN URBAN MATURITY

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Diane Della-Loggia
1972

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts



Author

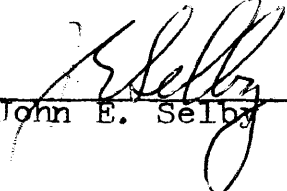
Approved, July 1972



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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to trace developing urban maturity in an eighteenth-century seaport, this study concentrates on the agencies--governmental and non-governmental--through which Baltimore residents sought civic improvement. Under the direct authority of the Maryland Assembly, the growing town was completely dependent on that body for internal regulation. In order to accomplish immediate community goals, town leaders often circumvented the legislative channels. They formed ad hoc groups to fulfill local needs. The division and reconstruction of the market house system, the engineering of a road under the court house, and the erecting of a bridge over Jones Falls were all carried out on a volunteer basis.

Acknowledged leaders in these projects were invariably from the business elite, and almost uniformly merchants. Baltimore became the boom town of the 1770s, the 1780s, and 1790s entirely by the commerce of its port, and not unnaturally it was commercial entrepreneurs who were accorded the deference to conduct town affairs. They saw their interests in opposition to those of the Assembly, which was dominated by the old rural tobacco planter class.

During the 1790s Baltimoreans tried to govern their town through the regular town commission and the new boards--the special commission and the wardens of the port. These committees proved inadequate; their mandate was vague and their powers circumscribed. Realizing the town's swift expansion to a heterogeneous urban center required central and local administration, merchant leaders pushed for city incorporation. The confidence and optimism of succeeding so rapidly in the pattern of the established seaports welded a corps of leaders able to demand home rule for Baltimore. Devoted servants of their town's progress, this elite nevertheless skewed community concerns even more to shipping and commerce.

BALTIMORE 1783 to 1797:
A STUDY IN URBAN MATURITY

Maryland

Long from herself, where depth her soil divide,
And Chesapeake intrudes her angry tide,
Gay Maryland attracts the wand'ring eye,
A fertile region with a temp'rate sky;
In years elapsed, her heroes of reknown
From British Anna nam'd her favorite town
But lost her commerce, tho' she guards their laws,
Proud BALTIMORE that envied commerce draws;
Few are the years since there, at random plac'd
Some wretched huts her happy port disgrac'd;
Safe from all winds, and cover'd from the bay
There, at his ease the lazy native lay,--
Now rich and great, no more a slave to sloth
She claims importance from her hasty growth,
High in reknown, her streets and domes arranged,
A group of cabins to a city chang'd.
Tho' rich at home, to foreign lands they stray,
For foreign trappings trade their wealth away . .

from the Newport Mercury, June 28, 1790

INTRODUCTION

Among other English cultural assumptions which remained long with them in the New World, American colonists carried an understanding of community life. Many of the emigrants had left villages or the more numerous-populated "towns." The appellation of "city," from medieval times, had applied strictly to the more important boroughs and connoted royal favor or honor bestowed as well as a more elaborate municipal government. In fact, it was specifically "a title ranking above that of 'town.'"¹ But the American milieu, holding out its promise of higher status, simultaneously with the contradictory expectation of democratic leveling, obliterated such neat distinction. The early American lexicographer needed to clarify the definition of city thus:

1. in a general sense, a large town; a large number of houses and inhabitants, established in one place
2. in a more appropriate sense, a corporate town; a town or collective body of inhabitants, incorporated and governed by particular officers, as a mayor and aldermen. This is the sense of the word in the United States . . .²
3. the collective body of citizens . . .

¹James A. H. Murray, ed., A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles (Oxford, Eng., 1893), 444.

²Noah Webster, An American Dictionary of the English Language, I (New York, 1828), 38.

Through an extensive trade, and its resultant civic pride, the residents of Baltimore certainly envisioned themselves as city-dwellers in the first and third senses. But from the close of the Revolutionary war, they intermittently struggled toward Webster's "more appropriate sense" of the city. The voluntary associations and commission form of government through which Baltimoreans attempted to resolve the problems and needs of living together eventually proved inadequate in their burgeoning metropolis, and on January 1, 1797, the "large town" became a legal corporation. A sympathetic account of how citizens of Baltimore coped with their residential proximity, and what meaning it had for them, from the April 21, 1783, celebration of independence from Britain until the January 1, 1797, independence from the Maryland Assembly is the subject of this study.

From archival materials--town records, census reports, and statistics--I obtained the most specific details about the physical, social, and political development of the settlement on the Patapsco River. Impressionistic pictures of town life and vitality were provided by contemporary travelers' tales, newspapers, and the documents found in historical journals. Except for the most recent issues of the Maryland Historical Magazine, most articles there were of the filiopietistic genre and more revelatory of the years in which they were composed than of the eighteenth century they purported to describe. Other secondary works, most notably dissertations published as monographs, were extremely reliable. The books in the Johns Hopkins University

Studies in Historical and Political Science were outstanding. Most surprising were the nineteenth-century histories, actually mere compendia of events and details in the early growth of Baltimore; essential facts in them were easily separated from their notorious eulogizing. The two pairs of chronicles, one by Thomas W. Griffith in the 1820s and the other by J. Thomas Scharf in the 1870s, were unfailingly useful in supplying the atmosphere and character of the city as well.

Most urban historians agree that from the earliest settlement, the life style in towns had a distinctive quality which was crucial to the nature of American life in all conditions. The colonial seaports--Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston--served as transmitters of European goods and ideas to the back country. "They were not called into existence by an earlier development of farming, but rather constituted the necessary positions from which agriculture and other activities, such as the fur trade, could spread inland without losing connection with the great world."³ Not only were they the spearheads of settlement but also its essence. "City life, in America as in Europe, formed the core of its civilization,"⁴

³Charles N. Glaab and A. Theodore Brown, A History of Urban America (London, 1967), 3.

⁴Russel B. Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation (New York, 1960), 124.

commanding a disproportionately large influence in culture. Finally, as the little seaports prospered, they outgrew the system of mercantilism which had conceived them, and fomented needs and notions which would eventually be responsible for the Revolution.⁵

However true the chronology may be for other towns, it is false for the case of Baltimore^t. Tidewater agriculture was the first pursuit of pioneer seventeenth-century settlers, and by its consistent success survived as the dominant economic fact of the region for many years. The countryside had indeed fixed the character of Maryland life by the era of urban development in the South. The city intruded as the stranger into the standard of country life.⁶ To complete the reversal of causality, the Revolution promoted Baltimore^t as commercial center rather than vice versa. Particularly during the years 1780 to 1800, when urbanization did not keep pace with the diffusion of settlers to the back country, Baltimore continued its rapid expansion. Urban population as a percentage of the total population fell from 3.8 percent in 1770 to 2.7 percent in 1780, only partly recovered to 3.3 percent in

⁵ Glaab and Brown, Urban America, 9; Constance McLaughlin Green, American Cities in the Growth of the Nation (London, 1957), 1.

⁶ Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans: The National Experience (New York, 1965), 172.

1790, and even in 1800 was a nominal 4.0 percent.⁷ Yet these were the years of Baltimore's most spectacular growth. For all its anomalies, Baltimore presents a fascinating object of research.

⁷W. S. Rossiter, A Century of Population Growth (Washington, D. C., 1909), 15.

CHAPTER 1 :
FOUNDING AND EARLY HISTORY

One of the innumerable inlets which served as sheltered docks for the tidewater Maryland planter was the northwest branch of the Patapsco River. There is evidence that the site of Baltimore was a tobacco trading center during the early years of the eighteenth century, and Edward Fell and John Moale are known to have kept stores there.¹ With hopes of being able to control tobacco shipments in the area, a neighborhood group petitioned the General Assembly of the state on July 14, 1729, "praying that a Bill may be brought in for the building a Town, on the North Side of Potapsco River upon the Land supposed to belong to Messrs. Charles and Daniel Carrol."² Such a bill was passed on July 30, with the provision for the new entity's government by seven town commissioners, appointed by the Assembly for life, and empowered to vote to fill their own vacancies thereafter. They were directed

¹ Clarence P. Gould, "The Economic Causes of the Rise of Baltimore," in Essays in Colonial History Presented to Charles McLean Andrews (New Haven, Conn., 1931), 234.

² Glaab and Brown, Urban America, 12; William Hand Browne, et al., eds., Archives of Maryland (Baltimore, 1883-), XXXVI, 315.

to purchase and lay out sixty acres, in sixty equal lots.³

Three years later the Assembly passed a similar act "for creating a Town on a Creek, divided on the East, from the Town lately laid out . . . called Baltimore Town, on the Land whereon Edward Fell keeps Store." The legislators ordered the ten acres allotted to be devised into twenty lots, and considered for this much smaller assignment five commissioners equal to the task.⁴ Known as Jonas Town, or Jones Town, the tiny community consisted only of three streets and was obliged to pay the proprietary a mere penny annual ground rent for one lot.⁵

These town charters were routine grants; in the early years the Assembly founded about one hundred towns, most of which never fulfilled their sponsors' hopes, and remained open fields. "The idea seemed . . . to be that a town would create trade rather than that trade must precede the town" ⁶ Geographic and economic conditions did not require seaports.

Thus, it is unclear why on September 28, 1745, the Assembly acted to unite Baltimore and Jones Town "into one entire Town," unless to delineate civic rules for the community. Twelve clauses made explicit several aspects

³ Ibid., 464. Thomas Bacon, comp., Laws of Maryland at Large, With Proper Indexes (Annapolis, 1765) gives the date as Aug. 8.

⁴ Archives of Md., XXXVII, 533.

⁵ Thomas W. Griffith, Annals of Baltimore (Baltimore, 1833), 22-23.

⁶ Gould, "Rise of Baltimore," in Essays to Andrews, 225.

of town behavior and responsibility, for instance, providing for the bridge over Jones Falls, limiting per capita tax to £3 a year, and outlining conditions for keeping geese and pigs.⁷ Two years later the commissioners of the newly consolidated town were authorized to open and widen streets and alleys, with the consent of the proprietors, and to arrange for the encouragement of commerce by holding two annual fairs. By any standard these delegations of power hardly signify local government, but the Assembly concluded the Act with a startling denial of the most basic representative function:

this Act, nor any Thing herein contained, shall extend, or be construed to extend, to enable or capacitate the said Commissioners or Inhabitants of the said Town, to elect or choose Delegates or Burgesses to set in the General Assembly of this Province as Representatives of the said Town.

Thus, from its inception, Baltimore was more circumscribed than many other colonial cities in power to meet local problems. The worst difficulty^f was, of course, not having the disposition of the town's revenue.⁸

Legal union of Baltimore with Jones Town (now referred to as Old Town, from its earlier settlement) did not insure economic or even physical union of the two portions of the town. They remained separated by the meandering creek, Jones Falls, spanned by only one wooden bridge. Two years

⁷J. Thomas Scharf, Chronicles of Baltimore (Baltimore, 1874), 34-36; Archives of Md., XLIV, 214-216.

⁸Archives of Md., XLIV, 654; Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 28-29. On the lack of financial independence see chap. 4.

later the Assembly countenanced the surveying and laying into lots of the low and marshy middle ground⁹ and on July 11, 1747, responded to a petition of the inhabitants with "An Act for the Enlargement of Baltimore Town." The eighteen open acres between the two port areas were then officially included in the town.¹⁰ Formerly an unhealthy swamp, this land was the property of Thomas Harrison, who recognized that even a marsh in such a central and prime location was too valuable to be sold, so he followed the English practice of letting the lots for ground rent on long leases, mostly ninety-nine years renewable forever. Rent was usually a few shillings or even a few pennies per foot per year.¹¹ By this means Harrison retained the land ownership for reasons of investment and credit. Yet the tenant held, for all practical purposes, his individual lot in the manner of an owner. The policy of long-term leasing (peculiar to Baltimore) was a great encouragement to new building on small capital but tended to hinder any further improvements or changes as the term of the lease drew on.¹² Since the individual with original title to the

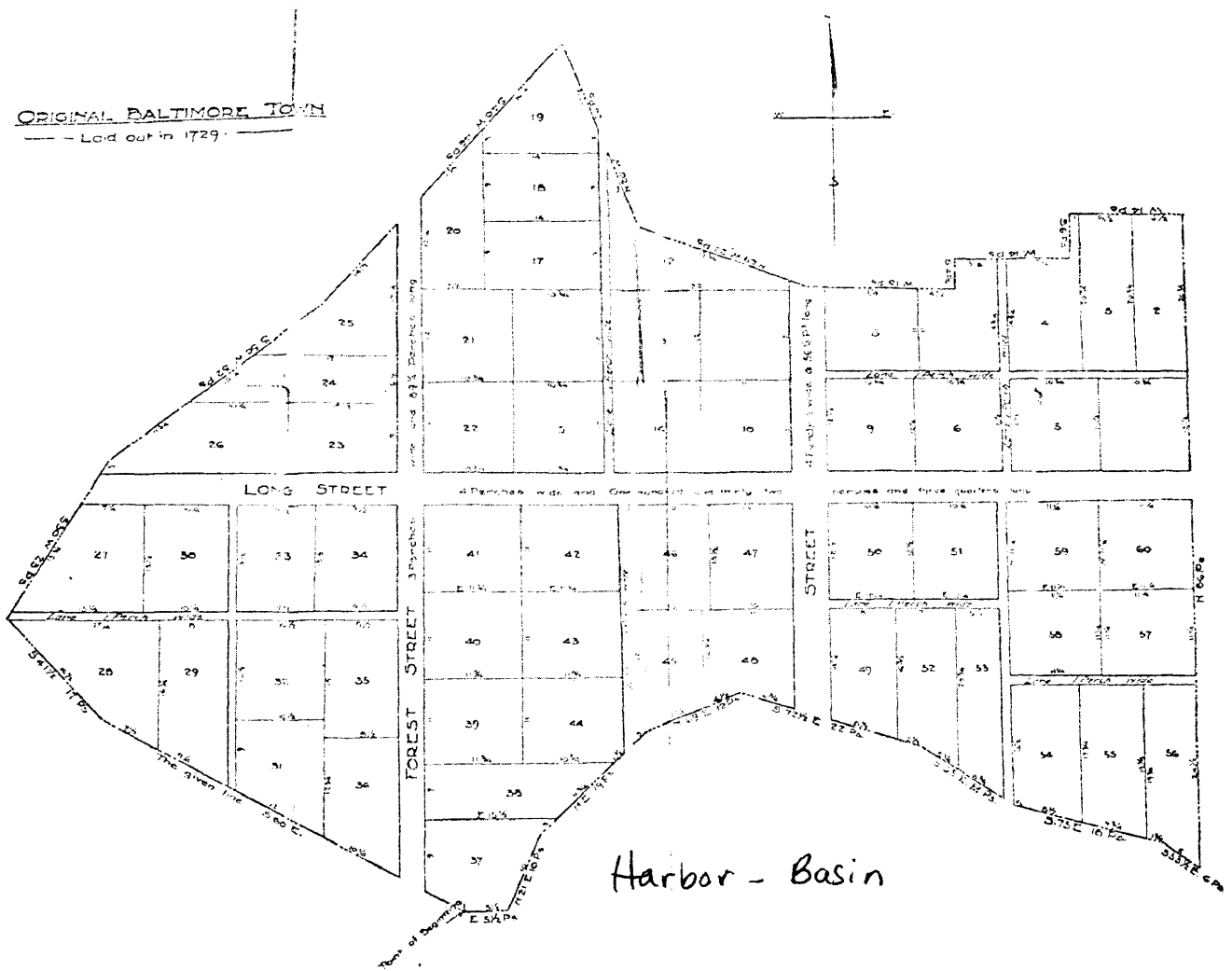
⁹ Clayton C. Hall, "Baltimore Town 1730-1797," in Clayton C. Hall, ed., Baltimore: Its History and Its People, I (New York, 1912), 17, hereafter cited as Hall, Baltimore.

¹⁰ Archives of Md., XLIV, 653.

¹¹ Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 115; Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser, July 2, 1784, hereafter cited as Md. J.

¹² Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr., "Address on City Planning," in Roy Lubove, ed., The Urban Community (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1967), 92.

FIGURE 1
ORIGINAL BALTIMORE TOWN



The first sixty lots remained at the center of the town; around this nucleus Baltimore grew. from Hall, Baltimore, facing 14.

land did not intend to sell it, the only scheme by which he could increase his cash income from the property was to subdivide the lots further and further and charge a ground rent for the smaller parcel similar to that obtained for the original lot. Thus, the ambition of the early land owners of Baltimore, who wanted both to keep their investment intact and yet to collect a high return on it, eventually led to the tiny lots on rectangular blocks¹³ able to support only the regular files of row houses now always associated with Baltimore.

With the discovery that the carrying of grain constituted a trade at least as lucrative as the transporting of tobacco the little port experienced faster growth. In 1747 seven ships were sent out, "a wonderful increase" over the one of the previous year.¹⁴ By 1750 a group of citizens had erected on the west side of Charles Street, near the basin, the first public building--a warehouse for the inspection and storage of tobacco.¹⁵ A public wharf had been started at the foot of Calvert Street.¹⁶ By 1752, when John Moale sketched his celebrated view of Baltimore from the river, the town boasted twenty-five

¹³ See the advertisements in the Md. J., especially that of John Gibbons, June 24, 1783, and that of Robert DeSilver, Aug. 20, 1784.

¹⁴ Scharf, Chronicles, 37.

¹⁵ William T. Howard, Public Health Administration and the Natural History of Disease in Baltimore, Maryland (Washington, D. C., 1924), 4.

¹⁶ Scharf, Chronicles, 38.

houses, four of them brick, signifying permanency, safety, and wealth, one church, and two taverns. Perhaps Moale omitted the^{*}less picturesque dwellings, for population estimates for 1752 agree in every instance on the figure two hundred.¹⁷

Over the next thirty years the Assembly was obliged to pass acts for patches of land added to the growing town. In 1753 thirty-two new acres were included in town limits.¹⁸ Fell's Point, to the southeast, with its rival docking facilities, was united to the town by law in 1773, but due to the interruption of the war, laying off of lots was postponed until 1781.¹⁹ The following year Col. John Eager Howard, a war hero and leading figure in the area, annexed land to the south of the town. Thereafter, authority to include new tracts of land within the town limits was possible with nothing more than owner consent; special acts of the legislature were no longer needed.²⁰ Perhaps this was the opportunity many had been awaiting, for a group of citizens gave notice in a Baltimore newspaper in 1783 that they planned to "lay out into Lots, Streets and Alleys" an area of the northwest of town: "This will render Old-Town, Philpot's Town, and a part of Fell's

¹⁷ William P. Craighill, "Baltimore and Its Defenses," Maryland Historical Magazine, I (1906), 28, hereafter cited as Md. Hist. Mag.

¹⁸ Scharf, Chronicles, 49.

¹⁹ Annie L. Sioussat, Old Baltimore (New York, 1931), 71-72; Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 88.

²⁰ Scharf, Chronicles, 201; Hall, Baltimore, 41.

FIGURE 2
BALTIMORE IN 1752



JOHN MOALE'S VIEW OF BALTIMORE IN 1752

- 1 & 2. Two Houses near Forrest Lane and Baltimore st.
 3. Near the corner of Sharp and Baltimore streets.
 4. Brewery. Hanover street opposite Indian Queen.
 5. House opposite Indian Queen Stables, German lane.
 6. A House which stood in Baltimore street.
 7. The first Tavern in Baltimore street.
 8. The first Tavern in Baltimore street.
 9. Capt. Darby Lux's, 500th Bank and west of Light st.
 10. Near corner Chatham street and St. Paul's lane.
 11. St. Paul's Church, the first built.
 12. Mr. W. Rogers', N. E. cor. Balbo st. and St. Paul's st.
 13. Kamessey's Tavern, Bank near Light street.
 14. N. W. corner of Bank and Calvert streets.
 15. The first Brick House built in Baltimore, erected on the corner of Calvert and Baltimore streets.
 16. Mr. N. Rogers', on ground of back building of No. 109 Baltimore street.
 17. Ward, the Harbor's, on ground 59 Baltimore street.
 18. Opposite Maryland Insurance Office.
 19. Near corner of South and Water streets.
 20. South east corner South and Baltimore streets.
 21. On or near Middleway street, opposite Calvert street.
 22. On or near Middleway street, opposite Calvert street.
 23. The Good Springs generally used by the Town, at the head of the Basin, a few feet west of Charles street.
 24. Drey point, where the second wharf was built.
 25. Skeleton of Sloop Dove's, first vessel belonging to Baltimore.
 26. Sloop Baltimore, the second vessel.
 27. Mr. N. Rogers', the first square-built vessel.
 28. Jones' Falls, as they appeared at that day from Federal Hill, whence Mr. Moale made his Draft.
 29. Calvert Street Wharf.
 30. Philadelphia Road.
 31. Site of Battle Monument.

Displayed in every previous book on Baltimore as "John Moale's Sketch," the above is identified by Hamilton Owens in Baltimore on the Chesapeake (Garden City, N. Y., 1941) as a Currier print romanticized from the 1752 drawing. See illustrations facing 30, 46. Fell's Point is not included; it would be farther to the right in the sketch. from Hall, Baltimore, facing 19.

Point, commodiously square; otherwise, if it is to be added to, Piece by Piece, as may suit the Interest of each individual holding Parcels of Land in the said Bounds, it will be attended with extreme inconvenience to the Public."²¹ Neighborhood residents were thankful to have at least a small part of the responsibility for planning their town.

Throughout the eighteenth century sharp economic competition characterized the relations between the original site of Baltimore Town, the innermost part of the harbor invariably called the Basin, and Fell's Point, a neck of land farther along the river by perhaps three-fourths of a mile by sea.²² The chief advantage of Fell's Point was the depth of the water surrounding it; at eighteen feet during normal tides it was twice as deep as the Basin harbor, which never exceeded nine feet²³ and which filled in gradually as each new wharf was built. In 1784 some lesser merchants published their fears of the loss of their Basin's navigability in an open letter to the wardens of the port, petitioning them to restrain the wharf-owners from merely dumping earth into the river for foundations for wharves,

²¹ Md. J., Aug. 12, 1783.

²² This is an estimate from Folie's map, converting perches to British rods and then to feet from wharf to wharf. Contemporaries mention the distance as 2 miles by land. Jean Pierre Brissot, "Nouveau Voyage dans les États-Unis de l'Amérique Septentrionale," in Oscar Handlin, ed., This Was America (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), 83.

²³ Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 101.

without first enclosing the area of it. They maintained

that the owners of Lots off the Water consider themselves as having equal Interest and Right in the Water as those who have Lots immediately upon it, and therefore hope and expect, (the law having made them special Guardians of the Water) that they will execute their trust without Partiality or Favour.

This instance is not the first or last in which aggrieved parties complained of official neglect, if not outright discrimination. But the petitioners concluded quite accurately, "the Navigation of the Bason, upon the Preservation of which the Subsistence and Property of so many people depend, is too serious an Object to be trifled with."²⁴ In addition to more attractive wharf facilities Fell's Point offered "the artisans and articles requisite" for the enterprise of shipbuilding, one of the leading industries of Baltimore. Because of these factors, this location experienced its greatest growth from 1752 to 1776. After the Revolution the area west of the Falls underwent the more significant expansion and remained the leader.²⁵ But until the city incorporation both neighborhoods showed great potential, and new settlers, unsure of which would eventually dominate, often hedged their bets by buying land in both sections.²⁶

That the entire town was becoming the most important center in the region, however, there was no doubt. An act of assembly in 1767 removed the official county seat to Baltimore from the interior country town of Joppa. Two

²⁴ Md. J., July 16, 1784.

²⁵ Scharf, Chronicles, 141.

²⁶ Ibid., 57.

thousand two hundred seventy-one inhabitants of Baltimore county had signed petitions for the transfer, complaining of the impassibility of roads to Joppa and the inadequate tavern accommodations there. The petition stressed the convenience of transacting public business in the same town where most private commercial "dealings of the Planters, Farmers, and other Country People of the County are carried on"27

Its most serious charge may have been the most persuasive argument, however, since it touched on the sanctity of property. The Joppa court house was described as too small and dilapidated, "insecure for the Purpose of keeping the Public Records, whereon the Estates of many of His Majesty's Subjects of the County, and elsewhere, depend"28

Counterpetitions to retain the Joppa seat defended the condition of the building by the desperate accusation of foul play. They insisted that Baltimore Town inhabitants had deliberately "Torn damaged and Defaced" the court house on election day "with a design of Destroying the same, and thereby paving a Way for a removal to Baltimore Town."29

Anticipation of their relegation to obscurity may have caused Joppa supporters to attribute the whole affair to the greed of Baltimore merchants. The removal campaign appeared to them as motivated by desire "to promote the Foreign Trade of Baltemore Town to the Prejudice of a great Number of

²⁷ Archives of Md., LXI, 522-523.

²⁸ Ibid., 521.

²⁹ Ibid., 566.

the most Antient and first settled Inhabitants who must be dragged there from distant Habitations for the sole purpose of leaving some of their Cash at Taverns etc to promote the Trade of said Place which in your Petitioners Humble opinions had better be Levied on them by way of Tax to support the said Town."³⁰

Baltimore's petition was granted. The new jail built in Baltimore to meet its responsibilities remained in use until 1800 and the new court house until 1808.³¹

Consequently, those who turned out to celebrate the cessation of hostilities with Britain on the night of April 21, 1783, could observe by the "brilliant illuminations"³² a bustling seaport, still raw, to be sure, with muddy unpaved thoroughfares, but clearly optimistic about its future. A German traveler at this time pronounced Baltimore "among the larger and richer American cities," its two thousand houses constructed mostly of brick. His population estimate of twelve thousand may be slightly high, but as a merchant, he probably was careful in his enumeration of fifty vessels in the harbor.³³ Gen. Nathanael Greene noted at the same time that "not less than 300 houses are put up in a year" and that the ground rents were nearly as high as in London.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., 567.

³¹ Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 44-45.

³² Scharf, Chronicles, 206.

³³ Johann David Schoepf, Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1794, trans. and ed. Alfred J. Morrison (Philadelphia, 1911), 326-328.

³⁴ Quoted in Stuart Weems Bruchey, Robert Oliver, Merchant of Baltimore (Baltimore, 1956), 35.

The streets were wide, their regularity imposed by the early surveyors. Rectangular squares gave ample space for two- or three-story houses with "sufficient provision for light and air, front and back." The blocks were cut by alleys, usually two, varying from three to ten or more feet wide, yielding rear entry to houses fronting on all four sides. Corner houses, with an alley alongside, might have light on three sides.

Although the land was low and marshy from the harbor to the first small hills, the tendency was to cling to the waterfront, with expansion to the east and west rather than the higher ground to the north. No one chose to build farther than necessary from the all-important wharf access. The demand for warehouses and residences near the waterfront in the rapid growth of the town after 1780, confronting the natural obstructions to building like the Falls and marshes, resulted in construction of dwellings in closely built brick blocks. Good clay nearby provided the brick. Stone quarries, also close, were mined only for use in foundations and public buildings.³⁵ "The sparse situation of the houses at the Point, and the cornfields and trees between that place and the town"³⁶ would soon be superseded. The entire accomplishment was conjured and maintained by the life of trade.

³⁵ William T. Howard, Public Health Administration, 2-3, 25.

³⁶ Robert Gilmore, "Recollections of Baltimore," Md. Hist. Mag., VII (1912), 236.

CHAPTER 2:
THE COMMERCIAL BASE

The highlight of the parade through Baltimore in celebration of Maryland's ratification of the Constitution was a fifteen-foot-long boat, converted into a miniature full-rigged ship and carried on a float. Revolutionary hero Capt. Joshua Barney and a crew of sea captains entertained the onlookers by continually hoisting and lowering its sails. Having named the ship the Federalist, Captain Barney determined to present it to George Washington and managed to sail it to the dock at Mount Vernon. In his characteristically correct style, Washington expressed his thanks to "the agricultural state of Maryland in general, as well as the commercial town of Baltimore in particular."¹ The distinction was proper but identified a complementary relationship, not a divergence. The crops that poured through Baltimore were products of the back country of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and even Virginia.

As a tobacco port, Baltimore had remained a collection of stores. Tidewater planters were close enough to the water to trade from their own landings. The⁽¹⁾ transactions were simple, often completed as barter with the ship captain

¹Hall, Baltimore, 48.

the only intermediary; wholesale tobacco meant for England was exchanged for retail manufactured goods imported from England.²

Two conditions were required to assure the development of ports: a change in staple crop and the settlement westward. Falling prices for tobacco at the same time as a back country migration worked to discourage cultivation of a crop too fragile, in any case, to be transported very far. Between 1720 and 1750 there developed in western Maryland and adjacent Pennsylvania a region without the conditions which had previously prevented an urban economy. The further complication of the nature of the exchange resulted in the need for one center rather than many. The new crops being planted were grain--wheat and some corn--intended for consumption in the West Indies. Since those islands did not offer any return trade for middle states farmers, brokers had to control a credit system and arrange for articles the farmers wanted from Europe to be purchased with the grain they shipped to the Caribbean.³ The very limited capital circulating on the frontier, as well as the farmer's inexperience with business methods, militated for urban management of his finances. In

²Gould, "Rise of Baltimore," in Essays to Andrews, 226.

³Ibid., 230-232.

addition, planters desired the assurance that a vessel would be available when their wagonloads reached the harbor--thus the necessity of one central depot. The wholesale merchant made himself the key to this economy with warehouses for immediate purchase and storage and stocks of retail goods to sell to his supplier.⁴

Factors leading to the designation of Baltimore as this urban depot are less deterministic than those which decided the flourishing of one rather than several. Although no historian deals directly with this question, most tender the advent of the brothers Stevenson from Belfast as the link between obscure Baltimore and celebrated Baltimore. Henry and John Stevenson were both physicians but apparently clever enough to descry that greater opportunity lay in commercial dealing than in physicking the local populace. Although he later declared Dr. Henry "the real founder of Baltimore,"⁵ Scharf was correct when he first explained Dr. John as the merchant and Dr. Henry as more inclined to his profession. They arrived in Baltimore in the late 1740s but it was not until 1754 or 1758 that Dr. John's imagination led him to dispatch vessels laden with back country grain to his native Ireland.⁶

⁴Bruchey, Robert Oliver, 31; James W. Livingood, The Philadelphia-Baltimore Trade Rivalry 1780-1860 (Harrisburg, Pa., 1947), iii.

⁵J. Thomas Scharf, The History of Maryland, II (Baltimore, 1879), 9.

⁶Scharf, Chronicles, 50; Hall, Baltimore, 69-70; Owens, Baltimore on the Chesapeake, 33.

Without an extensive local market, the wheat was cheaply bought in the area, yet it brought a handsome profit when sold abroad. John Stevenson's death in 1785 occasioned the following obituary: "He was the first exporter of wheat and flour from this port, and consequently laid the foundation of its present commercial consequence."⁷ Other ambitious and far-sighted men quickly imitated his venture, and it is from the late 1750s⁸ or 1760s⁹ that the fantastic growth of Baltimore is dated. For the next forty years there would be no slackening of prosperity. "Within five years what had previously been an obscure village was becoming the talk of the province, in a decade it had become the most important center of Maryland's trade, and in two decades it was safely among the leading seaports of America."¹⁰

Many coastal areas benefited during the colonial period from Indian menace or war in the West which hindered the movement of the frontier. But Scharf's unsupported assertion (concerning the French and Indian War) that "there is no doubt the growth of Baltimore was promoted by the continuation of the war" is patently false and conflicts with his own later statement that "within a year after peace [1764]

⁷ Md. J., Mar. 25, 1785.

⁸ According to Gould, "Rise of Baltimore," in Essays to Andrews, 236.

⁹ According to Bruchey, Robert Oliver, 31 n.8.

¹⁰ Gould, "Rise of Baltimore," Essays to Andrews, 238.

the town became suddenly the greatest mart of trade in the province."¹¹ For Baltimore prospered no more by migrants to its boundaries than by farmers in the West. Ironically, the faster immigrants sought the back country, the faster Baltimore grew.

The site had geographical advantages, of course. At the head of the tidewater, 172 miles from the ocean, it lay on an easily navigable inland sea. In its situation straddling the fall line, the town was at the junction of both alluvial and Piedmont soils.¹² However, as the back country products were the lifeblood of Baltimore's trade, so the roads constituted its arteries. During the years 1750 to 1770 the network of Pennsylvania roads shifted from an east-west orientation to a north-south pattern. By 1770 there existed in the region west of the Susquehanna River eight roads to Baltimore.¹³ The only practical road over the mountains from the Ohio Valley led to Baltimore. Water transport, however, was always preferable to overland on the frontier, and Baltimore's convenient location near the mouth of the Susquehanna was perhaps its most important advantage over Philadelphia in the competition for back country crops.¹⁴ Aside from the factors of terrain which

¹¹ Scharf, Chronicles, 51.

¹² William T. Howard, Public Health Administration, 1.

¹³ Livingood, Phila-Balt Trade Rivalry, 15.

¹⁴ "Baltimore in World Trade, 1729-1947," Peale Museum Historical Series (May 1947), 3.

led farmers of the interior to give Baltimore merchants a growing share of their custom, there were arbitrary prejudices present. "The pioneers of central Pennsylvania were politically, racially, and religiously like the inhabitants of colonial Baltimore." They more readily became working partners with them than with the aristocratic Quakers, the "merchant princes" of Philadelphia.¹⁵

Hinterlands of the two commercial centers clearly overlapped, and competition was strong for many years. The aggressive Baltimoreans captured increasing shares of the trade until perhaps 1820, when Philadelphia emerged as the primary entrepot. But until 1800 the Maryland port was undoubtedly the more vigorous of the contestants. The Susquehanna River was its natural ally, carrying produce from the fertile Pennsylvania valley to its warehouses. Moreover, as the farmers learned to navigate the Susquehanna through its rough and rocky stretches, Baltimore even reached for the trade of southern New York. It was common knowledge in the 1790s that prices in Baltimore markethouses were fifty percent higher than those obtainable in Albany.¹⁶ Geography and economy were already working for Baltimore. By seizing opportunities presented by the Revolution, energetic merchants achieved a full-scale boom town.

¹⁵Livingood, Phila-Balt Trade Rivalry, 4.

¹⁶Ibid., 27-33.

As the only southern port never hindered by the British blockade, Baltimore enjoyed a crucial period of unrestricted activity. While Philadelphia, Norfolk, Charleston, and Savannah were intermittently sealed off, and Annapolis was carefully watched by British cruisers in the Chesapeake, ships scurried in and out of Baltimore with what foreign commerce still remained, and picked up a vast share of the inter-coastal trade.¹⁷

Norfolk possessed an outstanding harbor, but its burning at the outset of the war left the Chesapeake served by Baltimore and Annapolis. British cruisers and Tory privateers did patrol the bay, but the "Baltimore clippers" consistently eluded them. The little schooners designed and built for the upper Chesapeake were swift and maneuverable and were often nearly to St. Eustatius while the more cumbersome merchant ships waited in clusters for a Continental cruiser escort.¹⁸ With a few more ships, and visionary foresight, the British might have successfully strangled Baltimore. The fact is, their blockade was not an effective bar to that town's lively commercial activity.¹⁹

With Annapolis stultified, Baltimore was declared in 1780 the chief port of entry for the state. A customs house was opened and shippers were granted there registers

¹⁷Jane N. Garrett, "Philadelphia and Baltimore, 1700-1840: A Study of Intra-Regional Unity," Md. Hist. Mag., LV (1960), 3; Livingood, Phila-Balt Trade Rivalry, 13.

¹⁸Robert Greenhalgh Albion and Jennie Barnes Pope, Sea Lanes in Wartime (New York, 1942), 55, 62.

¹⁹Ibid., 63; Curtis P. Nettels, The Emergence of a National Economy 1775-1815 (New York, 1962), 7.

for the entering and clearing of vessels. A naval officer kept charge during the war of the customs registry.²⁰

Tobacco factors had been overwhelmingly British and in other endeavors Baltimore merchants were sometimes mere agents of Philadelphians, but from the first the grain trade was dominated by Baltimoreans on their own account.²¹ The experience, not to mention capital, acquired during the Revolutionary upsurge in their business served them well during the next decade. While other ports complained of a post-war depression, Baltimore was not hurt by the British trade regulations of the 1780s. The British market for the old staple, tobacco, was stable, and the West Indies continued the demand for grain. Yet customs records show as a stronger factor in the shipping expansion during the Confederation the sharp rise in cargoes for other American ports. Actually, domestic trade was the single most important influence in crowding the wharves of the Basin and Fell's Point.²²

A 1793 visitor to Baltimore explained its economic rise to his diary this way:

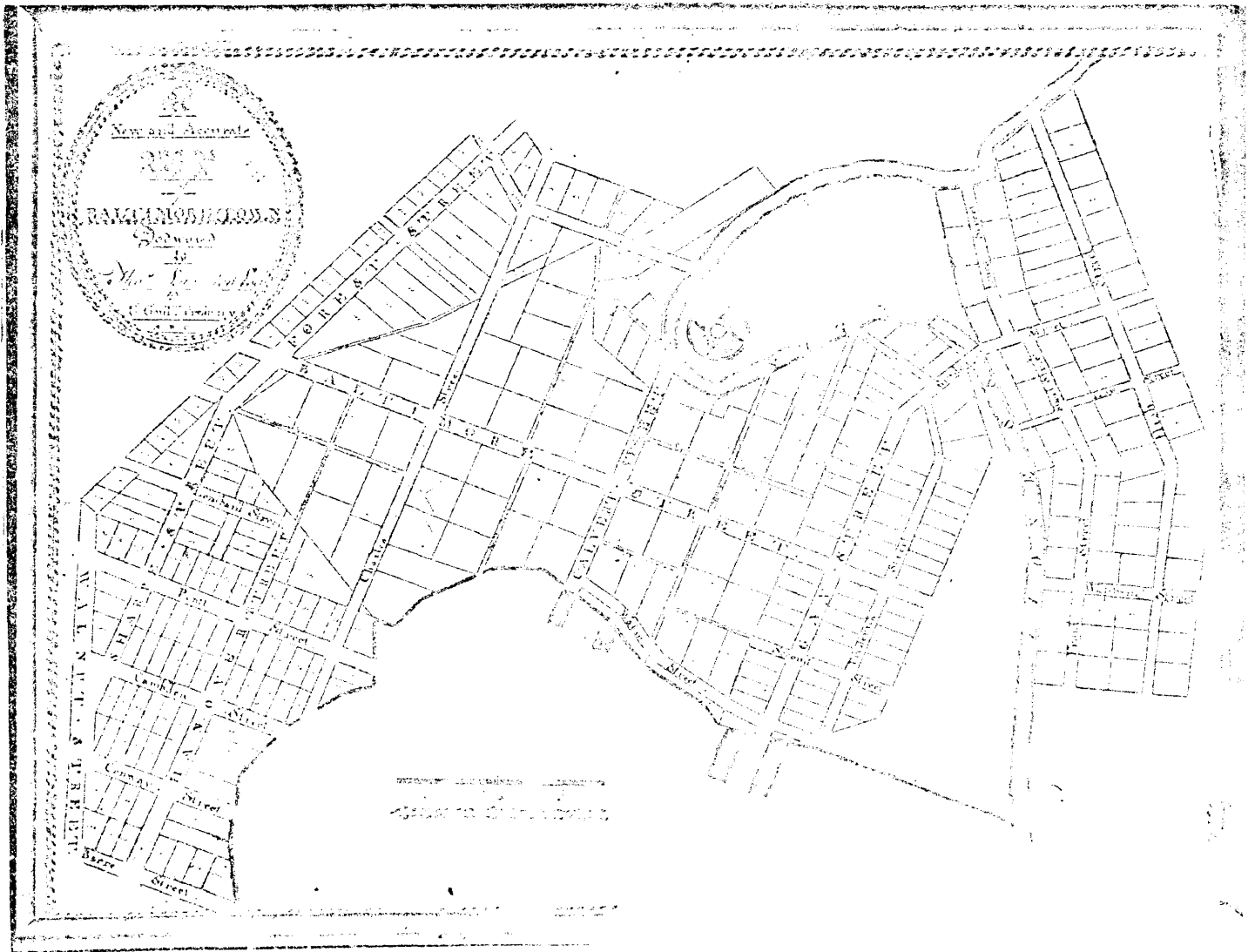
Baltimore has had the most rapid growth of any Town in the United States. It was truly a hot bed growth & owing to enterprizing Capitalists. Howe's going to Phil. in 1777 likewise diverted the back Trade to Baltimore. The sickness in Phil. this last Fall has done the same, & Baltimore this season will nearly rival Phil. in the export of wheat & Flour.

²⁰ Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 84.

²¹ Philip A. Crowl, Maryland During and After the Revolution (Baltimore, 1943), 56.

²² Rhoda Dorsey, "Baltimore Commerce During the Confederation," Md. Hist. Mag., IXII (1969), 120-132.

FIGURE 3
BALTIMORE IN 1780



The plat of Baltimore in 1780, when it first became a port of entry (only four wharves!). The public wharf is on the far left.

from Hall, Baltimore, facing 23.

Fascinated like other contemporaries less with the town's size or importance and more with the speed with which they were attained, he accurately estimated the population at thirteen thousand and continued, "From 1770 it took a Spring, & grew 100 fold" ²³

Under the impact of basic economic changes requiring the services of resident wholesale merchants, Baltimore experienced during the 1760s and 1770s "a hot Bed growth." The additional demands of wartime commerce produced by 1783 a corps of confident, capital-endowed merchants to whom the flourishing town appeared as a product of their industry, and consequently a justifiable sphere of their government.

²³ James Kent, "A New Yorker in Maryland: 1793 and 1821," ibid., XLVII (1952), 139.

CHAPTER 3:
GOVERNMENT BY COMMERCIAL EXIGENCY

Planted and nourished in the years when mercantilist theory was most influential, all the colonies understood economic regulation by government. Moreover, budding institutions needed central direction to be more productive. Yet this initiatory force was not, strictly, government. In the case of Baltimore, even if the prerogatives of the Baltimore town commissioners had been less circumscribed, the agency of government would have been inappropriate for first purposes.

Without public levies to be collected and spent, the mercantile community found its answer in voluntary subscriptions and lotteries. For the trading community's most pressing need, a public market house, merchants led a subscription campaign in 1751. Repeated notices calling for payment of the sums pledged appeared for the next decade, until by 1761 the original sponsors deemed their cache sufficient to begin building.¹ By 1763 the edifice had been begun at the corner of Market and Gay Streets, but was apparently not finished, for in that year a lottery was announced for "completing the Market-House in Baltimore-Town."

¹Scharf, Chronicles, 46.

Perhaps the work went so slowly because of the dispersed objects to whose use the town put the money. In addition to completion of the market house, the 1763 lottery was also for the purposes of "buying Two Fire Engines, and a Parcel of Leather Buckets . . . Enlarging the present Public Wharf, and building a New One."² With so many projects to be funded, it is not surprising that the tickets should be set as high as £1, but it is also interesting that only the very well-to-do could even consider buying one. For civic improvements designed to benefit themselves--the expediting of their business and the protection of the property they earned from it--the wealthiest class of the town was willing to undertake full responsibility.

In addition to its role as trading center for goods, the market house afforded the location of amusement for the entire citizenry. Above the stalls for produce, on the second floor had been built a large room for "public assemblies, dances, jugglery now and then, and other matters of public concern."³ What matters these were, besides dancing and juggling, it would be interesting to know, because by them the building took such hard use in the next twenty years that it was "considered most unpleasant and inconvenient." Fronting on Market Street, the unpaved principal thoroughfare, which spewed forth either mud or dust according to the

²George Howard, The Monumental City (Baltimore, 1873), 16; Scharf, Chronicles, 57.

³From the original agreement and subscription list in Scharf, Chronicles, 46.

season, caused much of the unpleasantness. Country folks arranged on the pavement with their wares were easily knocked over by passing vehicles "to the great destruction of Eggs and the disfiguring of Butter, and sprawling of Apples etc etc into the mud."⁴ Clearly the decorum, not to mention commerce of the town called for a larger facility. The March 11, 1783, Maryland Journal carried a notice-- signed by two merchants and an auctioneer⁵--that two lots had been purchased for "an Addition to the present Market-House." The subscribers were advertising for someone to demolish and cart away the building then standing on these lots, and to construct market stands anew.⁶ Either the intended annex was not in fact built or it quickly proved inadequate, for by 1784 there were again complaints that the trading areas needed to be increased. Various sections of the town desired the new market house in their areas; each neighborhood argued that it was the best location. Situations on Light and Holliday Streets were preferred by many, but when the executors of Thomas Harrison offered to donate some land on Harrison Street, several residents of that district immediately accepted the offer and subscribed money for the building's construction. This resolution of the

⁴John H. Naff, "Recollections of Baltimore," Md. Hist. Mag., V (1910), 114.

⁵William Thompson and Walker, Baltimore Town and Fells Point Directory (Baltimore, 1796).

⁶Md. J., Mar. 11, 1783.

issue satisfied only the inhabitants of the center of town, however, and those on Howard's Hill avlunteered to erect their own market building on the northeast corner of Hanover and Camden Streets. Not to be outdone, inhabitants of Fell's Point combined to build a market on that peninsula.⁷ The disadvantage of losing a central location seemed to be compensated for by new and spacious accommodations, as well as the surge in business activity which necessitated the full use of each business center.

Of the three new markets planned in 1784 and opened the next year, the one on Harrison Street (in swampland drained for the purpose) was the largest.⁸ Variouslly referred to as Harrison's Market or the Marsh Market, but officially Centre Market, it was situated between the old market and Jones Falls. The newspaper announced its completion on October 26, 1785, "for the Reception of Country People and Butchers," and that its market days would be Wednesday and Saturday.⁹

Fell's Point Market was, like the others, constructed of brick, in both the pavement and pillars, and well-roofed, but otherwise left open.¹⁰ The design was universally applauded as the most modern and attractive. The Howard

⁷Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 110.

⁸Scharf, Chronicles, 236.

⁹Md. J., Oct. 25, 1785.

¹⁰Scharf, Chronicles, 236.

Hill Market, at the west end of town, the head of the Basin, opened on September 15, 1785.¹¹ Its market days were proclaimed to be Monday and Thursday, and its glories described thus:

This building is constructed on the most convenient Plan, as both Purchaser and Seller will be protected from the Heat of the Sun, and their Situation will be perfectly dry and comfortable in the most severe Weather. Stalls or very large Benches, are provided, under Cover, for the Country People to show the Articles they may have for Sale--Excellent Water . . . adjacent, or close to the Market. The Convenience of the House to the Shipping, and at least one half of Baltimore-Town . . . every care taken to keep this large and convenient building clean . . .¹²

With the latest in efficiency and comfort thus available, the old market house was obsolete. The community was notified that on October 4 at ten in the morning at DeWitt's Coffee House it would be auctioned, having been for that purpose again conveniently "laid into lots."¹³

From conception to completion the new marketing system, the foundation of Baltimore's economy, was created and administered by a self-appointed merchant elite. They obtained the mandatory state government approval but no aid. Far from assisting in financing the market reorganization, the Assembly was directly involved with the scheme only to hold the board overseeing the project to a £5000 bond that the building would be soundly constructed.¹⁴

¹¹ Wilbur F. Coyle, comp., First Records of Baltimore-Town and Jones' Town (Baltimore, 1905), 54.

¹² Md. J., Sept. 16, 1785.

¹³ Ibid., Aug. 19, 1785.

¹⁴ William Kilty, comp., Laws of Maryland (Annapolis, 1799-1800), I, 1784 chap. LXII, and 1785 chap. XXXIII.

During the year 1784 to 1785, while the altercation over the location and facilities of the market house was still lively, the momentum of the interests of the same community was being exerted on the problem of the county court house. That edifice had been built sometime after 1768 at what was then the end of Calvert Street where it crossed East Street. In the development of the grain trade, however, roads diverging from the other side of the court house had become the primary arteries from the back country, and justice was literally standing in the way of commerce. To apply to the state assembly, requesting a special act for removal of the building, would have been time-consuming and undoubtedly fruitless. Without previous public notice, a group of subscribers (including leading tradesmen and artisans as well as merchants) signed an agreement on September 21, 1784, to support financially "the underpinning and arching the said court-house in Calvert Street aforesaid, so as large and convenient passages may be had underneath the same to the end that new communications may be opened with the country."¹⁵ The "architect" Leonard Harbaugh was engaged to accomplish the feat, replacing the earth to a depth of twenty feet with three arches.¹⁶ Only

¹⁵Scharf, Chronicles, 63-64.

¹⁶Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 111. In an advertisement Harbaugh described himself as "carpenter, architect, and inventor of useful machines." Md. J., Dec. 29, 1789.

then did this coterie of forty-seven men publish their design. They claimed that two "master-builders" of the town had assured them the proposal was perfectly feasible, and for the sum of £1100, a passage twenty-eight feet wide could be exposed within thirteen months, leaving the court house on a sure foundation. The primary motivation was explained as the circumventing of the obstacle which was acting "as an insurmountable Check to the Growth and Improvement of Baltimore-Town, by blocking up one of its principal Streets, and thereby preventing all direct Intercourse between the Town and Country" Added as justification for the plan was the argument that "it will effectively secure the Court-House from being injured by the Wastings and Moulderings of that Part of the Hill on which it stands, as well as render that Building ornamental to the Town" ¹⁷

Apparently fearful that the scheme would not appear well-founded to sober businessmen, its concocters appealed for funds to "the Public-Spirited in both Town and Country, especially those Persons whose Property may be immediately benefited by the undertaking." They continued with pride mingled with persuasion:

¹⁷ Md. J., Sept. 28, 1784.

FIGURE 4
THE COURT HOUSE RECONSTRUCTION



FIRST COURT HOUSE, 1768-1800.



FIRST COURT HOUSE,
With archway to permit pas-
sage out.

This Mode of Subscription, for accomplishing a Work so necessary and beneficial to both Town and Country, is considered the most unexceptional that could be offered; inasmuch as it compels no one to contribute, who may not be sensible of its Utility; while on the other Hand, it fully provides that such Persons as may look upon the Undertaking as unnecessary, or likely to fail, shall not be sub-¹⁸jected in either Case, to the smallest Tax or loss.

The "persons who" were to "undertake, at . . . their own expense and risk, to underpin and arch the court-house" stood to lose a great deal, however. In the preamble to the enabling act the Assembly conceded the importance and desirability of the construction but in the last clause held its sponsors liable for £10,000 should any damage occur to the standing building.¹⁸

This one example of private initiative among those united by a common involvement with the commerce of the town for a project of mutual (and exclusive) benefit reveals many aspects of life in Baltimore during the early years of the American republic. The realization that intercourse with the hinterland was crucial to their prosperity pervades the discussion. References to supplementing the beauty and order of the town are also significant as indicative of a growing civic pride in municipal accomplishment. One hopes that this project succeeded in terms of the flow of commerce and the order of streets, for it may have failed

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kilty, comp., Laws of Md., I, 1784 chap. XVIII.

by aesthetic standards. The astute observer Chancellor Kent of New York complained in 1793 that the court house was too small to be thrust so "high in the Air," destroying all proportion. "It has as bad an Appearance as a Man on Stilts."²⁰

Art more directly in the service of civic improvement is shown in the productions of the Theatre of Dennis Ryan, the profits of which were sometimes turned to mundane use. The Continental Congress had prohibited stage plays during the Revolution, but Baltimoreans had always been fond of them, and as early as January 1782 Wall and Lindsay's company was performing in the first permanent playhouse, just completed, on east Market Street. A year later Ryan reorganized the theater under his management and directed it successfully until his death in 1786.²¹ All the early companies performed halfway between Fell's Point and the main town, in order to attract patrons from both sections, but the theater building was always on the east side of Jones Falls,²² making the bridge over that stream figure prominently in theater propaganda. Ryan felt obliged to include in one advertisement "that the bridge is repaired, so as to make it passable for Foot Passengers and Carriages;

²⁰ Kent, "New Yorker in Md.," Md. Hist Mag., XLVII (1952), 141.

²¹ Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama From the Beginning to the Civil War (New York, 1923), 61; Scharf, Chronicles, 113.

²² Hall, Baltimore, 46.

and that he intends to have proper Lights for the Bridge and to the Theatre."²³ Perhaps these lines were inserted to meet his criticism, since they were not in time to forestall it. In a letter to the editor in the same issue of the paper, a serious-minded individual vented his resentment toward the theater, which he considered no municipal asset. He suggested an "experiment": the theater manager to devote the proceeds of several productions to "paving the Streets, and repairing the Bridges (particularly the Middle One, as it leads to the Theatre) and then Mr. Ryan, with his Catalogue of Farces would become a most useful Appendage to the Town." This lament is the perennial one: "Many people who, at this Time, would not give one Penny towards paving the Streets, etc., would give Ninety Times that Sum, to see Cato well-acted--Hence, Madam [the editor] it is plain, that our Scheme, well-managed, would delude those worthy Gentry, who are above the common place Method of Contributing to the Conveniences of the Public by Subscription, into a generous Contribution, by enveloping the Good of the Community with a Cloud of Folly."²⁴

Aside from the hostile tone of that writer's idea, it must have been well-received, for with the additional prod of reminding that "the old managers made a gift of £40

²³Md. J., Feb. 18, 1783.

²⁴Ibid.

to the Street Commissioners" what appears to be a different author is able to announce that "Mr. Ryan gives up the house Monday next, to some of our public spirited young Gentlemen, who have undertaken to act The Siege of Damascus, to assist in the necessary work of paving our Streets, the situation of which, for some time past, has been the greatest . . . drawback upon the prosperity of the Town."²⁵

The donation by Mr. Ryan of his playhouse, of seven young men of their acting,²⁶ and of the public of their attendance raised a small sum for town maintenance without ever involving any level of government. Although it is uncertain who decided the money would be used "for the Purpose of erecting a Bridge over Jones' Falls at the lower end of Baltimore [Market] Street,"²⁷ this allocation was undoubtedly a wise one, benefiting the citizens of Baltimore in general and drama enthusiasts in particular. That this method of deriving financial support for public benefactions was not confined to this incident is proved by the theater notice a year later, stating that Zara and The Sailor's Return would be acted for the poor of the town.²⁸

As instances of a recurrent pattern of American municipal arrangements, in which a few leading private citizens do a

²⁵ Ibid., Mar. 28, 1783.

²⁶ Ibid., Apr. 4, 1783.

²⁷ Ibid., Apr. 1, 1783.

²⁸ Ibid., Feb. 6, 1784.

great deal,²⁹ how does the experience of Baltimore fit? In the examples of the erection of public market houses, the reconstruction of the county court house, and performance of theater benefits are revealed the growing pains of a town expanding too rapidly to wait for institutional channels to provide means of achieving immediate civic needs. Baltimore had emulated other American cities in its rise to prosperity by means of commerce, and it certainly looked to them for models in its practice of subscriptions and lotteries to exact money for civic purposes. But the increasing needs of a growing urban center outran reliance upon voluntary devices for financing, and the community turned to the commissions it had been assigned by the Maryland Assembly.

²⁹Glaeb and Brown, Urban America, 17.

CHAPTER 4:
GOVERNMENT BY COMMITTEE

While Baltimore increased greatly in population and commercial importance during the Revolution, there was no corresponding development in the form of its political organization. Its 8000 inhabitants in 1781¹ still had only one administrative body, the board of seven commissioners instituted in 1729, which had perpetuated itself ever since without the disruption of popular election. The increase in population continued, amounting by 1790 to 13,503 according to federal census² and by 1797, at the time of incorporation, to an estimated 22,000.

The regular town commission possessed only those powers specifically given to it by the Assembly. Even to make a survey of the town, to ascertain what in fact constituted its domain, required legislative authorization, as in 1785.³ After the November 1784 legislative session conferred the ability to install street lamps and watchmen to guard the town, the commissioners convened at DeWitt's Coffee House

¹[Jared Sparks], "Baltimore," North American Review, XX (1825), 100.

²Adam Seybert, Statistical Annals (Philadelphia, 1818), 47.

³Md. J., Apr. 12, 1785.

to appoint the watchmen.⁴ The town was divided into six districts, and three men were designated as constables for the day and fourteen others to be watchmen during the night. On May 14, 1785, the commissioners approved an expenditure of £89.12. 6 for thirteen "Centry Boxes" to protect the guardians in all weather.⁵ To pay for these services, a tax of 1/6 per £100 property was assessed; clearly Baltimoreans by then felt they had something to lose. Jurisdiction of the watching and lighting functions was transferred in 1788 to the county criminal court under Judge Samuel Chase.⁶

The most important and numerous duties of the commission remained those pertaining to the market houses and related economic regulations. Without a broadly-based source of revenue, the commissioners needed to keep these institutions self-financing. For instance, when the Fell's Point market wanted a new roof, they resolved to deduct one hundred dollars from the fines collected on flour shipments for the purpose.⁷ Also, they set the "sallery" of the clerks of the market as "50 pr Cent on all Monies received by them on account of weighing and for all seizures made by them--"⁸

⁴ Thaddeus P. Thomas, The City Government of Baltimore (Baltimore, 1896), 14; Md. J., Mar. 4, 1785.

⁵ Coyle, comp., Records of Baltimore, 52.

⁶ Hall, Baltimore, 43, 48-49.

⁷ Coyle, comp., Records of Baltimore, July 25, 1791, 74.

⁸ Ibid., Sept. 28, 1792, 81-82.

They tried to imitate the English civil list tradition of self-support. But individual initiative was still the most reliable course to get things done. In 1793 the wealthy merchant Thomas McElderry offered to loan the commission £100 free of interest if it would use the money to fill in and pave the lower end of the Centre Market. The commission accepted.⁹ It would appear that the town treasury was low, for stall rents in all three markets were raised in June 1794 and again in April 1795.¹⁰ This period was that of Baltimore's greatest prosperity (when the wars in Europe made American foodstuffs even more desirable), and it is surprising that there was difficulty in collecting the rents.¹¹ But, of course, there still existed no formal means of coercion; all the commissioners could threaten to do was to publish lists of delinquent names.

The real power of the commission lay in its authority to appoint to civil regulatory positions. Commissioners made annual appointments to the following offices: weigher of hay, corder of wood, measurer of grain, inspector of flour, inspector of salted provisions, gauger of liquors, culler of staves, town auctioneer, and clerks of the markets.¹²

⁹Ibid., 87.

¹⁰Ibid., 90, 94.

¹¹Ibid., May 2, 1795, 96.

¹²Thomas, City Government in Baltimore, 10.

They were permitted, on their own, to multiply the number of individuals performing a duty when the volume of trade demanded it, or to add an office like deputy inspector. These positions were granted as monopolies, and could be very lucrative for the incumbent, who had ultimate power in passing on the quality, and thus price, of the goods intended for export. Repeated complaints to the board concerning David Moor, inspector of flour, were answered thus: "The commissioners having Examined the Law, and finding they have no power by the said Law to give redress in Such Cases dismissed the Complaint."¹³ They did not control the right of appeal for their own appointees. They were able, however, to remove an official during his term: on March 19, 1795, for unknown grievances, the commissioners displaced "Robert Thornburgh one of the Wood Corders, Abraham Norris one of the Hay Weighers" and announced that they would "appoint other Persons to Supply their Places on Wednesday next--"¹⁴

Times and places of meetings were subject to change or sudden scheduling. There is even the inexplicable case of Philip Graybell, elected on July 15, 1790, to replace as commissioner John Moale, who had resigned. Yet both Graybell and Moale had been recorded on June 21 as present

¹³Coyle, comp., Records of Baltimore, Aug. 25, 1791, 76.

¹⁴Ibid., 92-93.

and voting!¹⁵ Small town informality outlasted the conditions which created it. A significant advance was evinced when in 1792 the commissioners voted to have open meetings the first Monday of every month at ten in the morning in the court house,¹⁶ rather than random meetings at DeWitt's or Mrs. Ball's Coffee Houses. With a regularization of routine, perhaps the commissioners began to view themselves and their function as a continuous service rather than an ad hoc response to problems. The board was never able to assume the lofty function of planner, remaining essentially a referee to settle, typically, a dispute over where to fix a street boundary, or a cornerstone marker, or to authorize a wharf, alley, or street widening. It served most often to approve an intended or accomplished improvement by an individual citizen or to adjudicate contested claims.

To relieve the burden of the town commissioners, the Assembly at the April 1782 session created a new board of seven "special commissioners" to "direct and superintend the levelling, pitching, paving and repairing the street and repairing the bridges." They were empowered to fill their own vacancies, collect city fines, and report their activities to the regular board.¹⁷ The Assembly had second

¹⁵ Ibid., 69.

¹⁶ Ibid., 79.

¹⁷ Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 95.

thoughts about continuing the cooptative form of perpetuating this board, however, and at the November 1782 session changed the method of replacing commissioners to quintennial election by town residents through a "miniature electoral college," in imitation of the mode of electing to the state senate. Baltimoreans with £30 of real property elected nine men to be electors of the seven commissioners. Since they were permitted to elect from among themselves and had to select men possessed of £500 in real or personal property within town limits, this system was far from being democratic. But the electors were directed to make their selections to insure representation for various parts of the town "for there existed a certain degree of jealousy between inhabitants of the different settlements which had been united to form the town, and this continued even after it had become a city."¹⁸ Although this statement implies antipathy based on geography, a good case can be made that it was in fact based on class, as the residential sections were segregated. Merchants tended to live near the basin, and millers, manufacturers, artisans, and laborers near the fringes.¹⁹ Dissatisfaction with town services and progress on this basis formed the essential struggle for a change from town government by commission to a corporation.

The special commissioners encountered the same frustration as the regular commissioners--want of revenue. One

¹⁸Thomas, City Government in Baltimore, 13.

¹⁹William B. Wheeler, "Baltimore Jeffersonians, 1788-1800: A Profile of Intra-factional Conflict," Md. Hist. Mag., LXVI (1971), 159-160.

of their sources was linked to the volume of auction sales; the town auctioneer was required by a 1784 law to remit one-half of one percent on the amount of sales to the special board.²⁰ This source could not have paid the kind of bills they were accumulating, however. In the 1785 accounting the board claimed to have dispensed £4, 213.10.0 for the costs of material and labor in paving, repairing, carting, etc. For their own salaries they had allowed a mere £232.²¹

The special commissioners' most important function, the task for which they were created, was the supervision of street paving through^{out} the town. Undertaken during the spring and summer of 1783, this job proved bothersome. As a newspaper notice preceded and followed each new section of work, the train of their discouragement can be traced from April to August. At first the commissioners found cooperation. They held up "the laudable Example set by the first who have paid the Tax imposed on them by law with Alacrity, except a few; which circumstance alleviates the arduous Task of the Commissioners, to find that compulsory measures are unnecessary."²² Yet within a month they found themselves far in advance in credit and scolded: "There

²⁰ Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 108-109.

²¹ Md. J., June 21, 1785.

²² Ibid., May 6, 1783.

are a few Delinquents in the part of Town already paved, who may expect soon to be dealt with as the Law directs, which will be painful to the Commissioners, and cannot be pleasing to the Persons distrained on."²³ After repeated admonitions to have sidewalks conform to the new paving were ignored, the board calmly printed an edict: "All Foot-ways paved different from the common pitch and direction are liable to be torn up and regulated by the Commissioners, at the expense of the owners."²⁴

The public servants did not always meet their responsibilities either. A group of citizens took newspaper space to plead that something be done about the clouds of dust in the street; the inhabitants east of Jones Falls complained that two bridges were in disrepair; and "A Mechanic" composed a poem to charge neglect of the cleaning of the streets.²⁵ In short, no group found the special commission adequate. But "Hudibras" made a point in his rhyme:

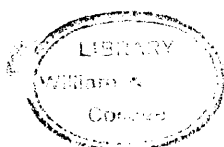
When Men attempt the streets to clean,
 We often find they strive in vain,
 And should they pave them to that End,
 'Tis ten to one they will offend;
 Commissioners! Do what you will,
 Yet some will grumble at you still.²⁶

²³ Ibid., June 3, 1783.

²⁴ Ibid., July 25, 1783.

²⁵ Ibid., June 21, 1785, Apr. 28, 1786, Nov. 9, 1784.

²⁶ Ibid., Apr. 28, 1786.



More extensively endowed with the latitude necessary for a governing body were the nine Wardens of the Port, appointed by act of the Assembly of June 1783. The property qualification was set at £1,000, so members were presumably trustworthy enough for the powers they held. They constituted a corporation, elected quintennially, but capable of filling vacancies between elections. Their duties included surveying the river and harbor, removing obstructions, approving wharf construction (see pages 16-17), and imposing a penny duty per ton on shipping to finance all such activities.²⁷ As Baltimore was a busy, successful port, the wardens were well supported until 1789, when the customs collected began to pass to the federal government.

A compilation of the wardens' annual financial reports illustrates the board's fluctuating fortunes. Income collected by the naval officer for "Port Duty" was published:

1783	£	37.10.	0
1784		86.11.	2
1785		235. 7.	4
1786		103. 5.	7 28
1788		256.17.	8 29
1789		102.12.	0 30

Then, for the year 1790, the wardens received only £83. 8. 1 in wharf rents and £5.11. 7 in fines.³¹ Stranded without

²⁷Thomas, City Government in Baltimore, 14.

²⁸Md. J., May 4, 1787.

²⁹Ibid., Mar. 20, 1789.

³⁰Ibid., Mar. 23, 1790 Extra.

³¹Ibid., Mar. 25, 1791.

the power to levy, like the other boards, the port wardens nevertheless governed a realm crucial to the economy of the state as a whole and were able to obtain early relief from the Assembly. In 1791 the special commission was authorized to conduct an annual lottery, with a maximum profit of £3500, two-thirds of which was required to be delivered to the wardens of the port.³² In addition, they were granted the privilege of collecting two pennies per ton duty on each vessel over sixty tons that berthed in the harbor.³³

This expanded base of revenue brought in great sums during the frenzied prosperity of the early 1790s. According to the 1793 accounting, the wardens had taken in £1,190.17. 4 from their auction percentage and tonnage duties alone.³⁴

Specialized town commissions, adequate for government of a village, failed as instruments for a flourishing commercial center. The doubling of Baltimore's population in the decade after independence threw into sharp contrast the inadequacy of the awkward governmental arrangement as well as its lack of representative character.³⁵ The more

³²Hall, Baltimore, 49-51.

³³Kilty, comp., Laws of Md., II, 1791 chap. LX.

³⁴Md. J., Mar. 17, 1794.

³⁵Hall, Baltimore, 39.

powerful and wealthy citizens of Baltimore could not remain content with a polity so badly adapted to meet their business and personal needs. They recognized that their interests required independence from the tutelage of the state assembly and believed the best alternative was town incorporation.

CONCLUSION

Whether the Baltimoreans who pressed for thirteen years for a corporate charter for their town were satisfied in their expectations is beyond the scope of this study. They had higher hopes than qualifying for Webster's "more appropriate sense" of the city. The leading merchants had petitioned unsuccessfully for this form of "home rule" to the Assembly in the fall sessions of 1784 and 1793 and had been strongly rumored to be planning such a lobby in March 1786. In the debate over the charter's merits, extravagant claims as to the resulting improvement were advanced. One writer declared horses being "rode through the streets in full speed" and "carriages of every description . . . driving jehu-like through the streets" were the sort of abuses to be reformed by a Town Council.¹ Most treatments of the incorporation struggle attribute its late accomplishment to the opposition of the mechanics of the town, due to their fear of high and direct taxation to follow from a strong local government.² It is difficult to understand however, in what way this group was represented in the Maryland Assembly.

¹Md. J., May 30, 1786.

²Thomas W. Griffith, Annals, 141; Scharf, History of Md., II, 603; Hall, Baltimore, 52; Sioussat, Old Baltimore, 137.

Rather, it was simply the hegemony of the planter class which held guardianship over Baltimore and was not anxious to yield it. Recent scholarship has suggested that "basically the conflict was between a frustrated, young, emerging society that contained over half of Maryland's qualified voters and was seeking to assert itself in state and national politics and a ripe, settled society that was trying to retain political control of the state in the face of a new and threatening opposition."³ Yet even the planters would have been obliged to concede that it was on the ambition of the aggressive mercantile community alone that Maryland by 1790 ranked fourth after Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania in foreign exports, shipping tonnage, and customs revenue.⁴ Statistics reveal the stagnation and depopulation of the southern and eastern shore counties during Baltimore's fantastic gain. In the 1780s the growth of Baltimore was "the overwhelming economic and demographic fact in the state. No other state was so dominated by a single town."⁵

Energetic merchants had built Baltimore by their own industry and were accustomed in their commercial dealings to leeway in decisions about foreign lands that they did not have in their own town. With the confidence born of accomplishment, they expected to conduct public affairs with the

³Wheeler, "Baltimore Jeffersonians: Intra-factional Conflict," Md. Hist. Mag., LXVI (1971), 156.

⁴Seybert, Annals, 12.

⁵J. R. Pole, "Constitutional Reform and Election Statistics in Maryland 1790-1812," Md. Hist. Mag., LV (1960).

same organization, efficiency, and above all--success--that characterized their business dealings. For while Baltimore's development conformed to the usual pattern of commercial expansion, it was distinctive first for the speed with which it occurred and second for the agility by which the town's merchant leaders shifted economic direction for different economic imperatives.⁶ Men talented enough to discern and manage the conversion of the staple economy from tobacco to grain were impatient with a public agency which had outlasted its appropriateness. In the town's progression to an urban center procedures designed for a homogenous community failed. The transition to paid service, for instance, rather than volunteer duty in such posts as watchmen and firemen, is an indicator of emerging civic maturity.⁷ The device of "ear-marking"--linking a specific source and destination of revenue--⁸also inadequately provided for increasingly complex public needs and services.

In the construction of the market houses and the court house and theater benefits, the city leaders served their apprenticeship in local government. With the experience they had gained this elite desired a more flexible latitude in urban affairs, local autonomy in name as well as in fact. The coterie that organized in 1786 the "Baltimore Canal and

⁶ Green, American Cities in the Growth of the Nation, 13.

⁷ Ernest S. Griffith, History of American City Government: The Colonial Period (New York, 1938), 264.

⁸ Ibid., 298.

Townclock Lottery" felt competent to conduct town business on a more formal basis. That enterprise was perhaps symbolic of their values and outlook; it endeavored to raise \$2000--\$1600 to straighten Jones Falls by means of a canal and \$400 for a clock to place in the cupola of the court house.⁹ Growing civic pride as well as commercial pragmatism instigated the political effort for urban incorporation.

⁹Md. J., Feb. 17, 1786.

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