



# THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY STORY

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## THE SILVER SPRING AREA

by

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### Part I

In Boyd's History of Montgomery County, Maryland<sup>1</sup> can be found this notation pertaining to the early land grant where the main part of Silver Spring is located:

"GIRL'S PORTION. This was surveyed for Colonel Dulaney, in 1688. It extends from Rock Creek, eastward, to O.H.P. Clark's farm, three and three-eighths miles. The Ashton and Sligo Turnpike passes through the tract. The Silver Spring Farm, the estate of the late F.P. Blair, and the residence of the Hon. Montgomery Blair, includes a portion of the tract; also, the Silver Spring Station and Sligo. The Brookeville and Washington Turnpike crosses it."

When Andrew Jackson was president he brought a young newspaper reporter named Francis Preston Blair to Washington from Kentucky, to edit a paper called The Globe, which would be favorable to the administration.

Congress had passed tariff laws which South Carolina did not like. The state legislature had nullified them. Jackson declared this couldn't be done. Blair, then living in Kentucky, wrote a stirring editorial in his home paper, The Argus, denouncing nullification. This caught the President's eye. He sent for Blair immediately to come and help him.

Though the young editor was from Kentucky, actually he had been born April 12, 1791, in Virginia. His father, James Blair, subsequently moved his family West.



When Francis came to Washington he became one of Jackson's behind-the-scenes advisors, being said to belong to the President's so called "Kitchen Cabinet." He bought a house on Pennsylvania Avenue, now known as "Blair House," which is used today as a guest house for the White House.

In those days Washington wasn't a healthy place in which to live. The land was low, containing many swampy areas. Basements of even the best of homes were apt to be wet. Malaria and typhoid fever were rampant, especially in the summer, and the heat of the season was oppressive. The mists which arose from the swamps were thought to contain infectious germs known as miasma. The common feeling was that the miasma caused the summer complaints. In order to escape the wet cellar of his home, and to provide a more healthy residence for his family in the summer, Francis Preston Blair set out one day on his horse, Selim, which had been purchased from Gen. Wm. Ligan Gaither. It was thought that beyond the second rise of hills to the north of Washington the terrain was high enough to be free from all danger of the deadly miasma. At that date the area was covered with woods where wild animals roamed, and residents were few and far between.

Blair was enjoying his ride when his horse suddenly shied at a rabbit, throwing him off. When the rider struggled to his feet and looked for Selim he found his mount caught by the reins on a bush. Nearby was a beautiful spring of water. A small column arose and fell sparkling in the sunlight. The sand and mica seemed to shine like silver. The newspaper editor was so impressed by the beauty of the place he decided to buy the property and build nearby. In all he purchased one thousand acres. One of the stones marking the boundary between Maryland and the District of Columbia is located on the property purchased by Blair.

In 1842, Blair had his summer dwelling built. It followed the architectural lines of a French chateau. He named his estate Silver Spring. To preserve the spring he built a summer house over it. This is standing today. The roof is constructed in the shape of an acorn. Although Blair was a man of keen mind, had great business ability and political acumen, he was also a sentimentalist. He had proposed to his wife under an oak tree with acorns scattered all about. When the couple were married they had their silver decorated with silver acorns. The architecture of the spring house followed the same pattern.

Francis Preston continued to use Silver Spring as his summer residence until 1854 when he gave his son, Montgomery, the house on Pennsylvania Avenue, and moved to his country home permanently. He still took an active part in national politics, breaking with the Democrats over the issue of slavery and secession. He believed the Union should be preserved even if it meant war. He and his sons helped to form the Republican party. His daughter, Elizabeth, had married a naval officer, Samuel Phillips Lee. She had one son, Blair, who in later life was U.S. Senator from Maryland. Admiral Lee, though of southern descent, also remained loyal to the Union, and during the Civil War was in command of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, the naval force which blockaded the South. In this terrible period Elizabeth and her son were living with her father at Silver Spring.

On July 11, 1864, Jubal Early marched down what is now Georgia Avenue (then called The Union Turnpike) intent upon capturing the capital city. The Lees, with the Blairs, fled into Washington ahead of the advancing Confederates. Jubal Early camped for the night by the famous spring. John C. Breckenridge, a rebel officer, and cousin of the Blairs, used the main house for his headquarters. For this reason it was spared, but the home of Montgomery Blair, Falkland, which stood nearby wasn't



so fortunate. The soldiers entered it, and finding dresses belonging to Mrs. Comstock, a half sister of Montgomery, dressed up in them for entertainment, and then burned the house to the ground.

Before arriving at the Blair homes, the troops passed through Sligo, a small community directly north of the Blair estate. A country store at this point, whose cellar was stocked with liquor, was broken into and ransacked. The soldiers fell upon the liquid refreshments with alacrity. They were thus in high, good spirits when they arrived at the Lee home. They found in this cellar a barrel of Bourbon whiskey. With this added to those spirits of the country store the revel around the spring reached unprecedented heights. Early's attack upon undefended Washington was therefore delayed until July 12. The Southerners' drunken revel probably saved the capital from capture.

The city at this point was in a state of nerves when it realized that Early was camped upon its very boundary. Its only defenders were a few companies of government workers who had been doing some drilling, and wounded veterans who had recently been discharged from hospitals. Abraham Lincoln sent an urgent message to Grant to send troops. The second division of the Sixth Army Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. George W. Getty, was immediately dispatched to the defense of Washington. Gen. Getty didn't come with the troops. Instead he sent Brig. Gen. Frank Wheaton. The soldiers debarked at the Seventh Street wharves to the tune of Early's guns attacking Ft. Stevens. Seasoned veterans of numerous battles, they marched up Seventh Street, bringing a measure of confidence to the frightened inhabitants of the District. They arrived in time to repulse the Confederate attack and saved the city from capture. The grateful residents of the Maryland area were so impressed with Gen. Wheaton's bravery they renamed Mitchell's Crossroads "Wheaton" in his honor.

After the smoke of battle had subsided seventeen bodies of the Army of Virginia were picked up and brought to Grace Episcopal Church for burial. They were buried in a row in front of the cemetery. When General Getty retired from active duty he bought a farm three miles north of Silver Spring on the Union Turnpike (then called Brookeville Road) and lived there for the rest of his life.

When everything was safe from the rebel force the Lees and the Blairs returned to their country home. Montgomery Blair rebuilt Falkland making it his dwelling until his death. It then went to his son Montgomery who raised his family of seven children there. The house and grounds were sold in 1958 to make way for the Blair Shopping Center. On Sunday morning, Sept. 7, 1958 the Silver Spring Fire Department burned down the old residence as the easiest form of demolition.

In a map of 1865<sup>2</sup> the road now known as Georgia Avenue is shown going through the Silver Spring area as it does today. It was at this time a dirt road with a hard flint rock bed. It started at Westminster, Maryland, following the route marked on recent maps as 97. It has had various names, the first being the Westminster Road. In 1830 Allen Bowie Davis, resident of Greenwood, introduced a bill in the Legislature to make a turnpike out of the thoroughfare. A group of farmers joined together to found The Union Plank and Turnpike Co. Actually, work wasn't started on the project until 1850.

The purpose of the company was to give the highway a solid foundation to eliminate the mud in the winter. Toll gates were set up at various places and the enterprise got under way. When work was slack on the farms the owners would have stones collected from the fields and sell them to the company. These were spread out on



the roadbed, and negroes, with long wooden handled mallets (the mallet head being steel) would stand all day breaking up the flint rock. When the pieces were small enough, dirt was spread over them, the wagons pulled by horses on their trips to and fro, being the means of pressing it down.

With the organization of the company the road was called The Union Turnpike. Later it became known as the Washington and Brookeville Road, then the Seventh Street Pike, and recently Georgia Avenue. A part of this early road can still be found in Linden and Chevy Chase. Apparently a branch turned off from Georgia Avenue and what is now Hanover Street, going through a colored settlement, and across Rock Creek, thence on to Tennallytown. In Chevy Chase and also Linden there are streets still retaining the name Brookeville Road.

There once stood on Hanover Street a large house. It is said to have been converted into a residence from an old Inn, which took care of travelers on the highway. An owner in the 1920's related that it contained a small bricked-up cellar room with a slit of a window at the top. Fastened to the floor was a ball and chain, probably used to punish recalcitrant slaves.

The Ashton Colesville Road entered Sligo, but stopped at what is now a shopping center in Silver Spring. It was cut through to Sixteenth Street in recent years. The Esso Gas Station, situated on the South West corner of Georgia Avenue and the Colesville Road, is the site of the famous country store which contained the liquor the Confederates fell upon with such glee. In later years it was the home of the Cashell family. Mr. Cashell was the first Rural Delivery man to go up Georgia Avenue. In a horse-drawn vehicle, he made the trip up the Seventh Street pike through rain, snow and heat, every day, to carry mail to the residents, many of whom lived on large farms.

On this map of 1865, Silver Spring isn't listed. The home of Francis Preston Blair is shown on the West side of the Brookeville Road, and that of Joseph Crandle on the East side. Above the Crandle place, on the Ashton Colesville Pike is the name B. Shrider. Descendants of this family still live in the area.

Directly north of the Blair property is the name "Sligo Post Office." It is now in the heart of the Silver Spring shopping district. The old name has disappeared.

In 1865 there was a post office at Sligo, a toll gate and a few residences. On the west side of the turnpike were the homes of John T. Barnes, W.K. Davis, John Fidler and Keys. A store is listed, as is also a blacksmith shop. On the east side could be found the residence of Dan. Hodges, a store, John Fidler's blacksmith shop, and a wheelwright named Th. Gidings. Above the wheelwright is the property belonging to John C. Wilson. On the west side is that owned by Richard Wilson, both sons of Thomas Noble Wilson, a vast land owner of the area whose acreage was granted to his forebears by the original authorities in Maryland. A Wilson descendant said that the slave quarters of their plantation were located about where the Hahn Shoe Store stands on the northeast corner of Georgia Avenue and the Colesville Road.

On a map drawn in the late 1870's<sup>3</sup> the B and O Railroad is shown. The post office is still listed on the map at Sligo, and Silver Spring Station is listed, as are also Linden and Forest Glen Stations. On the east side of the Brookeville Road, apparently on the Wm. Batchelor farm, which was directly north of the Forest Glen Road (then known as the New Cut Road) there stood a Wheaton Post Office.



By now churches had been built. On the east side of the Pike, at Sligo, there is shown the Methodist Church, further up on the same side is Grace Episcopal Church, and across the road at what is now called Montgomery Hills, there stood the Mt. Zion Methodist Church belonging to the negroes.

#### CHURCHES

The oldest church in the area at Forest Glen (now included in Silver Spring) is St. John's Catholic Church, established in 1774 by Father John Carroll, and his mother, Eleanor. John Carroll, a cousin of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, was the first Catholic Archbishop of the United States. His family had moved from Upper Marlboro into what is now Montgomery County. They located on a tract of land which they called Carroll Springs. The site of the home was near seven springs. These springs produced such a flow of water that in later years National Park Seminary piped it in for the entire use of their boarding school of over two hundred girls.

Carroll Springs was also the home of Daniel Carroll, Bishop Carroll's brother. Daniel Carroll had been a member of the Continental Congress 1780-1784, and as such had signed the Articles of Confederation on March 1, 1781. He was a delegate to the convention that framed the Federal Constitution. He was a member of the State Senate of Maryland, and was a Federalist in the first U.S. Congress March 4, 1789 - March 3, 1791. He took an active part in fixing the seat of government for the United States, and was appointed by President Washington, Jan. 22, 1791 as one of the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. He served in this capacity until July 25, 1795.

The home of these two illustrious men has been torn down and the springs destroyed. It was located within the blocks bounded by Riley Rd., Landsdown Way, and Westview Dr., in Silver Spring.

After John Carroll's death the little church was served by the Jesuit fathers from White Marsh and Georgetown. During the greater part of the nineteenth century a succession of priests ministered to the parish, generally being sent out from Rockville. In 1889 to 1940 Father Charles O. Rosensteel became a resident priest. He was followed by Msgr. Joseph T. Kennedy. Now Father Echle is the priest assisted by two associates.

Father John Carroll's chapel, the first place of worship erected by the Catholics at Forest Glen, was a small frame building, a replica of which stands in the cemetery now.

The second church was dedicated in 1850. The third one built of brown stone, standing today, was begun in March of 1893 and dedicated April 9, 1894. The fourth St. John's Church is located on Georgia Avenue on the site of the large frame house of Wm. Batchelor, first treasurer of Grace Episcopal Church, which was later bought by Gen. George W. Getty. The latest and present St. John's was dedicated May 27, 1962.

St. John's has played an important part in the life of the Silver Spring area. It ministered to the religious needs of the Catholics of the community, as well as contributing to its social life. During Father Rosensteel's pastorate a large church festival was held every summer to raise money for the parish. It was the social event of the season. Booths were set up where fancy goods, cakes, candies, pies and other baked goods were sold. There was a merry-go-round for the children,



grab-bags and other entertainment, all outside. In the afternoon a tournament was held. Young men from the neighborhood, on horseback, dressed as knights, rode at a gallop with lance in hand, to spear a small ring suspended from a line stretched high across the road. The knight who won could crown the maiden of his choice the queen of love and beauty at a dance held in the evening in the parish hall. If the weather permitted, with no thunderstorms, tables were set up under the large oak trees where a bounteous dinner was served. If the rain did come the dinner was held inside.

In the brown stone church there hung a large bell. It was rung at six A.M., twelve noon, and six P.M. Housewives set their clocks by the bell. Farmers listened for it when working in the fields. The ringing of St. John's bell kept everyone in hearing distance informed of the correct time.

The second church of importance to the area was Grace Episcopal Church. It was founded in 1857 when Mrs. Samuel Phillips Lee and Dr. Josiah Harding went to Baltimore to ask Wm. R. Whittingham, Bishop of Maryland, that an Episcopal parish be established. An acre of ground was donated by Thomas Noble Wilson for the church. Due to the unsettled days of the times, with the rumble of Civil War rocking the land, the building proceeded slowly. The first minister, The Rev. George L. Mackenheimer, served in 1863, presumably in a house. Legend claims that all during the war there was no roof on the church. Some of the oldest inhabitants related that as Jubal Early marched down the Union Turnpike to attack Washington, he saw the roofless frame structure. Upon asking why it hadn't been completed he was told that there was no money to finish it. After the war was over, so goes the tale, he sent a check of one hundred dollars to pay for the roof. Another version, told by a member of the Wilson family, is that while the Confederates were consuming the Lee's whiskey, before the battle of Ft. Stevens, Early asked why the building was roofless. Upon hearing the reason he pulled out one hundred dollars from his pocket and gave it to a messenger to take to the Rev. Mackenheimer, because the general thought his men had fired on the church.

In whatever way the money was raised the building was finally completed. The first roll of communicants was listed in 1867. The original church was used until 1896 when it burned down on June 6, of that year. The second church was ready for occupancy by Jan. 1897. It was larger than the first and covered with brown shingles. There was no slave gallery in it as there had been in the original structure, but the negroes were allowed to come and sit in the last three pews.

In 1897 the Washington, Woodside and Forest Glen Railway and Power Co. was formed. The trolley line was granted right of way in front of the property in exchange for free electricity as long as the line should operate. In order to make way for the tracks, the bodies of the Confederate soldiers had to be removed. They were all placed in one grave at the southwest corner of the cemetery. A group of Southern sympathizers collected money for a monument to be erected over them. It is there today.

In 1930 the trolley company was discontinued and the tracks dug up. The church then lost its free electricity, much to the chagrin of the supporters.

With the expansion of the Silver Spring area, the brown shingle church became too small for the congregation. A new brick building to hold six hundred communicants was erected behind the frame one. The first service in the new church was held on Christmas Eve 1956. The older members of the parish were saddened to see



the brown shingle church torn down in 1967 to make way for a new educational building to meet the present needs of the large congregation which at this date supports two clergymen.

The third parish to be founded in the area was the Woodside Methodist located today at 8900 Georgia Avenue. It was first established in 1872 on a part of the John C. Wilson farm at Sligo, at the spot about where the Chamber's Funeral Home is now, 8655 Georgia Avenue. Mr. Wilson deeded the lot to "The Trustees of Sligo Methodist Church affiliated with the Northern or Methodist Episcopal Church." The small frame building was dedicated June 11, 1873. In 1897, when the trolley line was started, the tracks came so close to the door the church was moved on rollers up the turnpike to a lot donated by Judge Benjamin T. Leighton. The address there was 8750 Georgia Avenue. With the new location the name was changed to the Woodside Methodist Episcopal Church.

The congregation outgrew its second home, and in April of 1924 a new brick church was begun. The building was dedicated on April 18, 1926. An addition was completed in 1939. This created a need for more parking space. Land to the south of the church was bought at a cost of twenty-two cents a square foot. On Sept. 30, 1962, the congregation accepted an offer of one million, five hundred thousand dollars for its holdings. A site for a new church at Ballard Street and Georgia Avenue was purchased and a new sanctuary emerged. On March 12, 1967, the Woodside Methodist Episcopal Church was consecrated, the membership being about twenty-seven hundred persons; the facilities are worth approximately two million dollars.

Some time in the 1870's the negroes, who had always been welcomed at the existing churches, decided they wanted a church of their own. The white land-owners gave them the land, which was located on Georgia Avenue at what is now called Montgomery Hills. They also raised ninety-five percent of the money for the former slaves, and a frame building was erected. The name given the parish was "Mt. Zion Methodist." The colored people kept their property in good order and held regular services there until 1966 when it was sold for two hundred thousand dollars. The church was demolished and the bodies in the small graveyard removed. The land is now the site of a Safeway Grocery Store.

On the north side of Linden Lane there stood for many years, near the B and O Railroad tracks, a small abandoned church. It had belonged to a Presbyterian congregation. The first minister, sent out from a parent church in Bethesda, was Dr. Parke Flournoy. The second pastor, Dr. Angus McNair, was said to be so tall a special bed had to be made for his use. Apparently the parish didn't flourish. The members attended other churches, and so the attempt to establish a Presbyterian church was abandoned. Before its demolition the little building was used by the boys of the neighborhood as a club house for their organization named "The Linwood Club." In those days abandoned buildings were safe. There was no vandalism in these communities.

Today Georgia Avenue can truly be called an avenue of churches. Many denominations can be found represented along its length, none having had to go through the early struggles of the first five parishes.

(To be continued)

Notes

1. History of Montgomery County, Maryland  
by (Col.) T. H. S. Boyd (1879)
2. Martenet and Bond's Map of Montgomery County, Maryland. (Balto., 1865)
3. Atlas of 15 miles around Washington  
by G. M. Hopkins, C.E. (Phila., 1879)

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For further reading, see

The Montgomery County Story  
Vol. VII, #3 (May, 1964) Daniel Carroll of Rock Creek  
by Martha Sprigg Poole  
Vol. VIII, #1 (Nov., 1964) Montgomery Blair  
by Mildred Getty  
(also notes on Silver Spring)  
Also "To Light the Way" (History of Grace Episcopal Church)  
by Mildred Getty

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