

History Of Architecture

Baltimore County, Maryland

POST-INTERNATONAL STYLES

“Modern” might be expected to mark the end of the line in any narrative, but people keep on building things and the absurd word “post-modern” was coined by Charles Jencks to describe architectural trends that arose once boredom set in—with embarrassing rapidity—with Miesian glass-box office blocks. The Bauhaus gang could not have foreseen any style succeeding their own achievement of perfection—any more than the Thousand Year Reich should have lasted but 1.2 percent of its timetable—but sure enough, humans grow weary of perfection, especially with anti-human monuments. In the 1970s and after, buildings blossomed into forms that quoted classical pediments, mansard roofing, and simplified Palladian windows; soon architects were incorporating variations into the rectangular volumes that once seemed here to stay. Some people vehemently hated the glass-box and concrete-box products of the bauhaus perfectionists from the very start. Tom Wolfe’s 1981 book denounced the whole school. Vincent Scully in 1991 scorned the squarish buildings as “inert slabs,” and many a man-in-the-street disliked the style on an instinctive basis. Dr. Scully is an admirer of almost every other style of architecture from Mayan pyramids to the Empire State Building and the mud houses of New Mexico, but sneered elegantly at the topless towers of the World Trade Center and vehemently damned the Boston City Hall of which Towson’s 1976 County Courts Building is a low budget carbon copy in precast concrete.

At least four styles followed the International as tabulated in the handy pocket guide, *Clues to American Architecture* by Marilyn W. Klein and David F. Fogle. Some of the styles relate to skyscrapers, of which our county had none until the 1960s. With the development of Hunt Valley Industrial Park, downtown Towson, and Owings Mills Town Center, high-rise buildings once found only in urban financial districts appeared in the county, even beyond the I-695 beltway. Klein and Fogle’s classification for post-International includes:

- a. Mid-20th Century Contemporary (1945-1975)
- b. Post-Modern (1965-Present)
- c. Sculptural
- d. High Tech.

The first type, “mid-20th Century Contemporary,” would include residences with great overhanging gable roofs, wood decks, mixtures of glass and stone wall, patios under wooden arbors,

and also churches with sweeping gable roofs, and structures for institutional use that attempt to look both rustic and “modern.” Possibly the Goucher College administration complex could be plucked out of the international style chapter and dubbed “contemporary.” The word “contemporary” now gets frozen in the past, rather than moving up each day and year as “modern” used to do.

“Sculptural” describes buildings, usually made of poured concrete in a shape that suggests what goes on inside, some obvious examples being the Morris Mechanic Theatre, Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, and New York’s Guggenheim Museum. The Baltimore National Aquarium is also described as sculptural because of its use of glass pyramids for its greenhouse area. Towson’s twin curved apartment houses on East Joppa Road might also be thought of as sculptural, as might the John Deere warehouse south of Padonia Road.

“Post-modern” style can be found in remarkable variety. In fact, more categories are needed to sort out what we see all over the nation and the world. Many recent residences incorporate the Palladian window outline and so do some of the brick office buildings constructed in the county by Clark MacKenzie, many of them displaying simplified versions of the clerestory windows first seen locally in 1840s cotton factories; arcades and other features are reappearing, and the Rutherford Business Park is a layout of low-slung buildings of Japanese tea-house descent, fairly homey looking. An office complex on the York Road north of Towson, Orchard Hill, contains vestigial Palladian windows set in yellow brick walls. But some critics hate post-modern because decoration and “history” are once again getting a foot in the door.

A puzzling building, certainly post-modern, is Martin’s West, a banqueting hall at Dogwood Road and I-695. A mixture of glass, blank walls, columns, and classical details, the structure provokes endless jokes, such as, “Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company meets Karnak.” Sitting on an embankment of grey crushed rock, the facility seems to be a vast, flat-roofed Parthenon. Speculation abounds whether the design was the architect’s joke on the client or the client’s joke on the dinner guests. At any rate, the glass walled main vestibule is aglow with a crystal chandelier that would have made evening affairs feasible in Upper Egypt. The many round columns probably serve as reminders to the ticket buyers at political fund-raising events of our Greek democratic and republican heritage.

“High Tech” buildings rely on thin walls of mirrored glass or aluminum skin, and in city centers are quite tall, and these days quickly built. Some sculptural effects appear, such as pyramidal roofing, finial towers for “executive” space, and slanted top floors rather than flat roofing. Phillip Johnson and John Burgee were the pioneers of this style, which might also be partially post-modern in allowing whimsical variations, set-backs, and the sort of spiked tower tops that once made each skyscraper unique, or at least distinguishable by the average observer of cityscapes. The blue glass tower at 9690 Deereco Road north of Timonium introduces sharp angular walls and shadowy angular recesses to keep it from being the older type of “inert slab.” Its architects were Columbia Design Collective. A mirrored glass office building called “Timonium One” is more high tech than Miesian; it does not stand on piers and it is not a mere rectangle but has a number of setbacks at each end. Sometimes it seems to be green, other times it is blue with massive reflections of cumulous clouds. The set-backs at the south end fall away from the viewer in a wizardly cascade of pure glass planes. The architects were Meyers & D’Aleo.

BEST PRODUCTS STORE

An almost whimsical structure is the Best Products store opened in 1978 at Towson Market Place. The building has one wall designed to look as if it were falling off and sinking into the ground. The company tried other eye-catching designs around the country, including buildings that seem to be crumbling at the corners. Inside, the store is as ordinary as any other useful space. The bold designs are the work of James Wines of Site, Inc. Whether shopping-mall patrons notice such folly type architecture is unknown. By 1996, the building in Towson was scheduled for demolition, and its "crumbling cookie" counterpart in Houston had already been redesigned and ruined. (*Sun*, May 13, 1996) Demolition of the Towson example took place April 18, 1997, during the Baltimore convention of the Society of Architectural Historians. The school of shocking architecture is probably in the tradition of roadside attractions such as elephant-shaped buildings, dog-shaped buildings, and ice cream parlors resembling high-buttoned shoes.

AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS

BARNs AND OUT BUILDINGS

Barns are the great dramatic unit of farm operations, but in the first years of settlement on new lands, the earliest barns were probably small and hastily constructed. The account of farming in northern Maryland by Jasper Danckaerts in 1679 would suggest that cattle and hogs were left to forage in the woods until slaughtering time. The first generation of planters probably built their tobacco house before anything else because their main cash crop had to be dried and cured after harvest and protected from the weather until buyers arrived in the Fall Fleet to ship the barrelled product.

It is difficult to say anything about the evolution of barns between 1659 and the 1798 tax list. It is not even possible to say when British-born settlers began to build in log rather than riven boards, although the Swedes and Finns were building in log in New Sweden (now Delaware) as early as 1638, almost two decades before there were any settlers in Baltimore County.

Henry Glassie described the use in the South of two square log outbuildings separated by a small yard that was later walled in with more logs to form a primitive barn, the double-pen barn. (Glassie, 1969, pp. 88-91) Jordan and Kaups traveled to Sweden and Finland, finding proof of the Nordic origin of the design. (Jordan and Kaups, 1989, pp. 196-210) The 1798 tax list enumerated many log barns described as "old;" given the endurance of log, those buildings may well have been the first structures on those particular farms, especially since the tax lists that survive are from the interior of the county where settlement had taken place only 70 to 80 years before. At least three thatched-roofed barns were listed in the area of My Lady's Manor and a few other thatched structures were found farther west. Fairly few stone barns are found in the entire list, and those not at Hampton, Perry Hall, or any of the great show places. In Back River Upper Hundred, a few large barns were entirely of stone including one 40 by 80 feet at Samuel Owings, Jr.'s, Green Spring Punch estate and one 34 by 64 feet at Ellen Moale's Green Spring. It would take the agricultural boom of the two decades following 1798 to flesh out the fertile valley lands with their stone mansions and stone outbuildings. Scholars of Pennsylvania architecture point out that post road travelers believed that the entire State to be full of stone barns, but the stone types were actually confined to the southeastern corner in that State's 1798 tax list, the interior and the west being served by log barns. One notable Chester County barn bears a date stone of 1767, but the style took longer to reach Maryland.

The Maryland 1798 tax list gives dimensions and materials of barns but the appearance of the structures is a mystery. Illustrations were nonexistent until about 1795 when Charles Willson Peale and Francis Guy began to paint landscapes of gentlemen's estates. The surviving barn at The Meadows near Owings Mills is apparently the same one recorded by the assessor in 1798, a structure of one log story set on a stone story. The tax list carries barns as small as 16 x 16 at Joseph Wheeler's, with a 30 by 50-foot frame barn at both Timonium and The Caves, and a 20 by 50-foot barn also at the Caves, then the property of Nicholas Carroll.

Gittings-Baldwin Barn



If the surviving Meadows barn is a good model, most of the 18th century examples were probably gable-roofed and rectangular. Dr. H. Chandler Forman's drawing of the Furley Hall barn showed a stone structure 75 by 30 feet with small, human-sized doors instead of the wide animal entrances seen later. (Forman, 1956, p. 155) The 1798 tax list of Furley Hall's "hundred" is missing, thus it is impossible to prove that the barn existed in the 18th century. Francis Guy's 1805 painting of the Perry Hall slave house showed a large barn that stood until 1913 on the Lacey farm at 4014 Perry Hall Road, but the 1798 detailed list is also missing for that neighborhood so we cannot give its dimensions. The 1798 list also included a thatch-roofed barn, 36x18 feet, in Mine Run Hundred, the property of Elizabeth Rosier.

A great many subsistence farms in 1798 seemed to have no barn at all, but many stables were enumerated, along with corn houses, meat houses, poultry houses, wash houses, dairy houses, spring houses, and an occasional ice house, and a few loom houses, a number of mills that were part of a farm rather than a separate business, and in the case of Hampton and Mount Clare, orangeries—that is, large greenhouses for growing a few lemons and oranges for the owners' tables. There were also carriage houses and wagon sheds.

The 1798 tax list would suggest that tobacco houses had become rare in Baltimore County, the economy having switched to grain production anywhere from 1735 to 1750.

The small spring houses were occasionally used to cool butter, but in some cases, a larger building, the dairy house, was constructed for cooling milk and making butter and cheese. At one authentic present-day colonial museum, a cat was seen sampling the rounds of maturing cheese; cats were a necessary part of the team in barns and mills before rodent control companies came on the scene. William B. Marye in his deed research determined that a 10 by 10-foot spring house or dairy at Bellevue near Kingsville was the same building mentioned in the survey of "John's Delight" in 1745; the small stone structure still stands (Schleicher, 1975).

Books have appeared on American barns but no study of local examples has been attempted, although one writer studied springhouses at length. Switzer barns have frequently been mentioned in advertisements in the early 19th century. One "Sweitzer Barn" was advertised in the *American* of

June 7, 1832, part of Grove Farm. A Switzer Barn was probably a Swiss or German design with a projecting story partially cantilevered to shelter the barn yard. The other side of a Switzer barn was often built into a hillside so that hay wagons could be driven up the bank to the second story level. Second stories were also used as a threshing floor—although in some cases threshing was performed out-of-doors by having the grain trodden out by horses. Hay was also stored in one-story structures of more English-barn appearance known locally as barracks although some persons called them hay mows, the word “mow” rhyming with “cow.” In the Yorkshire Dales, there are examples of bank-built hay buildings called “sink mows.” The vast space in fully developed barns was for the storage of hay to feed the cattle over winter.

An advertisement in the Baltimore *American* of February 3, 1823, offered a farm 22 to 24 miles from Baltimore between the York and Falls Roads, the former property of Samuel Johnson. There was a “STONE BARN, 48 by 63 feet, in which there is a Thrashing Floor for six men, and underneath the whole are stables and feed houses to accommodate a number of horses and cattle.”

Stone barns were provided with ventilator slits and sometimes with small openings formed of inserted bricks to exhaust the heat generated by large animals penned inside. Some of the ventilator holes are formed in hour-glass and sheaf-of-wheat patterns and have attracted photographers in Maryland and Pennsylvania. The sheaf-of-wheat design is used in the stone barn at the Glencoe Gardens nursery shop at York and Ensor Mill Roads, the hour-glass design on the Tanyard Road barn. The small vertical slits were never intended to be gunports for firing muskets at Indians because, as Eric Arthur and Dudley White state in their chapter on Pennsylvania barns, the stone barns came on the scene almost a century after the disappearance of the original inhabitants of America. (Arthur and White, 1972, pp. 104, 235) Similar air slits appear in medieval English barns depicted by modern photographs (Cook, 1982, pp. 69-70).

In England and Germany, barns vary in design from county to county and quite a variety of designs are found in Baltimore County, with many more models coming on the scene in the 19th century influenced by Gothic Revival and Queen Anne style main houses. There was even more effort to make stables echo the design of the owner’s mansion, especially on the estates of the wealthy. This was the age of gorgeous barns and fancifully decorated stables soaring over the lush pastures. Living over the stable was probably more luxurious than dwelling in the drafty box-like frame house of a subsistence farm. Spectacular round and octagonal barns appeared in the 19th century in other parts of Maryland but we have no known examples in Baltimore County. The age of farm magazines was launched by the publication of the *American Farmer* in Baltimore in 1819. After the Civil War, the *Maryland Farmer* began publication and ran for decades. Barn plans were circulated nationally by such journals. A Towson paper reported that Milton Dance’s new barn at Valley View “was built without a single mortice and tenant” by contractor S. P. Demuth in just 18 days (*Maryland Journal*, December 2, 1893)

Hayfields Horse Barn



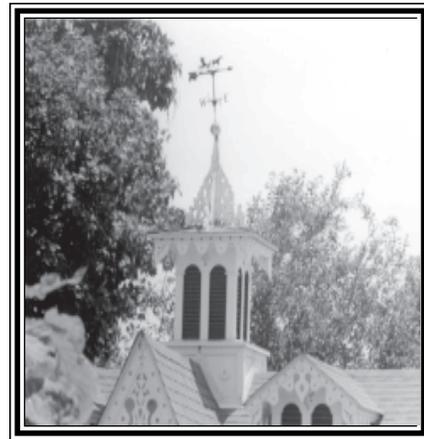
An elaborate barn in antique English form served the Montebello mansion of General Sam Smith and probably was built at the same time as the main house in 1808. Smith was said to have designed both his country seat and town house himself but recent evidence credits the elegant Federal county seat to William Birch. The barn had a steeply pitched main roof broken at five places along its extraordinary length by six sharply peaked cross-gables flanking a gable-roofed entrance pavilion. It was slated for demolition when a photo of it appeared in the *Sun* of September 14, 1942.

Farmers once built “fodder houses” in the cornfield at the end of the season by weaving standing cornstalks into a temporary rectangular structure about 20 by 300 feet. The interior space would be filled with cut cornstalks and the contents would be thatched over with a roof of more cornstalks. The British traveler Richard Parkinson described Baltimore County fodder houses in 1798. This region never employed the sort of haystack piled up around a central pole that was used in the Valley of Virginia and North Carolina, or depicted in Monet’s paintings of rural France.

Civil War photographs provide glimpses of Maryland barns, usually in the west, but good local photos came in not many years later.



Hayfields



Weathervane, Smith Brothers Carriage House

WEATHER VANES

According to Eric Sloane, weather vanes were used as far back as the 1600s by American farmers to determine if the day would be dry enough to plow, plant, or harvest. The ca. 1732 copperplate engraving found in the Bodleian Library at Oxford depicted the three chief buildings of Williamsburg: State House, college, and palace, all sporting weather vanes. On the plat of Joppa Town, 1725, a weather vane appeared on St. John’s Church in a small, almost symbolic drawing. Not many artists recorded the rural scenery of Maryland in the 1700s but toward the end of that century, numerous paintings by Francis Guy depicted gentlemen’s’ country seats, but usually showed only the dwelling rather than the barn where a weather vane would have been installed. A familiar 1798 drawing of Baltimore Town and County’s courthouse showed it with a weather vane, and about 1811, an early panoramic view of the growing city showed at least three on church spires. One flew atop the State House at Annapolis in an 1832 engraving. Thomas Ellicott’s 1795 drawing in Oliver Evans’ millwrighting book showed a model mill similar to those at Ellicotts Lower Mills and at Occoquan, Virginia, with a hollow- fish type of weather vane at the gable peak, high above the loading doors of the mill. The original, Wren-type spire on the Towson court house had been topped off with a finial, two globes, and an arrow as depicted in a woodcut in the *Baltimore County Advocate’s* calendar for 1857; those same elements were probably reused when the spire was shortened in 1863. The earliest photograph of the courthouse shows the present cupola, two metal globes, and golden wind arrow.

Eric Sloane noted that early vanes lacked letters for the points of the compass because barns were always set on a north-south or east-west axis, leaving the calculation of direction to the farmer, who was an instinctive geographer (Sloane, 1982, pp. 286-287). The Francis Guy paintings of fine houses suggest, however, that lightning rods were in frequent use only a few decades after their invention by Benjamin Franklin in 1749.

SILOS

The age of the silo began in Howard County at Oakland Farm in 1876. At first, silage was buried in underground pits, later in towers part above ground, part sunken, both round and square in cross-section. The square silo proved to be unsatisfactory because of the material lost in the corners. Silos were still experimental early in this century when the University of Maryland issued a book on the subject in 1909; a number of Baltimore County examples were shown. Eventually, dairy farms came to resemble each other with a large gambrel-roofed barn flanked by double silos.

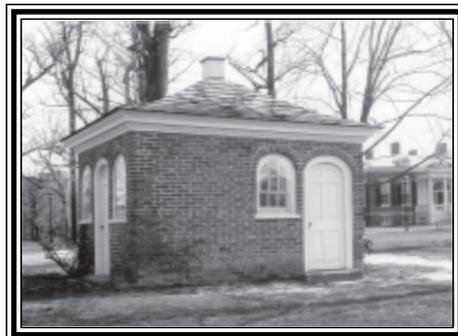
Modern farming has changed the landscape with soy-bean elevators, wire-mesh corncribs, prefabricated barns, and fodder storage under plastic tarpaulins. Some of the functions of the classic barn may be replaced by advanced storage methods.



The Silos at Brooklandwood

PRIVIES

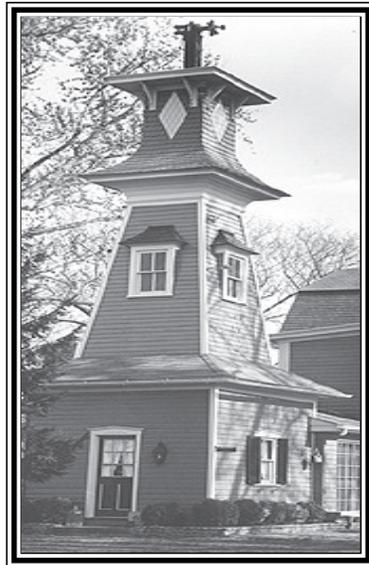
The privy or necessary house has been described in at least four specialized books but with a lack of high seriousness. The subject was under research in a rational manner a few years ago by a docent at the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts, and the Baltimore County Public Library supplied illustrations and pertinent statistics; unfortunately, the book has yet to appear. Archaeologists have recently become interested in abandoned privy pits because of the number of artifacts that have fallen into the depths without being retrieved. The deep recesses were often used by housewives and children to hide the shards of valuable ceramics they had accidentally smashed in the main dwelling.



Homewood Privy

WINDMILLS

The farm windmill that is often called the “Kansas farm windmill” could well be a Maryland “first.” Baltimore’s General George Page displayed a metal windmill at the Maryland Institute Fair in 1848. The mill had a tail-piece to keep it square to wind and its sails were designed to “throw off any surplus wind.” The year before, Page had ground 13,000 bushels of corn with wind power and the device was advertised for raising water, sawing timber, and threshing grain. Page’s windmill had even been hitched to a buggy wagon in which its inventor was “propelled at a considerable speed” through the streets of Washington as reported in the *American Farmer* (December, 1848). A few years later, A. P. Brown of Brattleboro invented an air motor called “The Vermont Windmill.” In 1883, R. G. Kirkland of Ellicott City was manufacturing a wrought-iron “wind engine” which won a medal of the 1885 Timonium Fair. Most farm windmills in this county were used for pumping water and they were gradually rendered obsolete as electric power lines covered the rural areas. Most windmill towers were open constructions of metal struts, but at Greenlea on Long Green Road, the 1886 windmill that still stands was boxed in by a wooden structure in French Renaissance Revival style.



Windmill Tower at Greenlea,
Long Green Road

FENCES

Fences of split rails supported at the ends by X-shaped cradles and arranged in an irregular pattern were characteristic of rural Baltimore County, where the building of walls was fairly rare as compared to the Shenandoah Valley, Middletown Valley, or New England. Locally, such enclosures were called worm fences; although, according to *Eric Sloane’s America*, New Englanders called them snake fences. The term “worm fence” appears in an 1885 deed drafted by Dr. Charles A. Leas of Glyndon (Liber WMI 147:426). These primitive fences were probably the first generation of design, but none appear in the paintings of estate houses executed by Francis Guy between 1795 and 1805. However, Guy showed picket fences at Bolton and post-and-rail fences at Mount Deposit. (Colwill, 1981, pp. 65, 58) Many of Guy’s small paintings of houses on the Finlay chairbacks showed post-and-rail fences; Eric Sloane’s books show how easy it was for a colonial axe-man to shape the slots in the posts.

Recent research has established that the worm fence or “stake and rail” fence was introduced into New Sweden (now Delaware) in 1638 by the Savo-Karelian Finns. (Jordan and Kaups, 1989, pp. 105-112) The post and rail fence was also Fenno-Swedish. Both types of fences were still found in the Nordic countries in the 1980s.

Occasionally, colonial resurveys of properties on which title had lapsed enumerated the number of “panels of old fence” abandoned by the previous owner. But the innumerable 18th century newspaper advertisements for strayed cattle and blooded horses suggest that fencing was almost as inadequate as in the 17th century when the Dutch traveler Dankaerts reported how Maryland livestock ran wild in the woods. Any worm fences seen today are probably a recent replacement.



Worm Fence on Ivy Hill Road



Post and Rail Fence off of Geist Road, 1966

SLAVE HOUSES

Slave housing was a necessity of colonial and early 19th century life in parts of Baltimore County. While slaves were not high on the social scale, they did represent a substantial investment that had to be sheltered in winter and provided with cooking facilities and bedding. The slave dwellings were part of the grouped outbuildings of a typical farm or plantation. There are few clues to any kind of geometric layout of outbuildings in this county, much less of the orderly grouping slave housing seen in other counties and other States as presented in John Michael Vlach’s *Back of the Big House*. Small dwellings survive that are said to be slave houses but sometimes they seem to be too much in high style to have been used for what was euphemistically called “the servants.” People who own such houses are not always eager to be associated with the concept of slavery. Sometimes the slave house was not planned; more likely it was the first settler’s own house that he had outgrown and passed on to his workers; with only two houses, one freshly built, and one second hand, there was no scope for geometric layout.

There is no uniformity about the slave houses, real or so-called, that have come down to the present. Hovels made entirely of wood were probably devoured by termites long ago as surely as the starter cottages of the tidewater country settlers. Early housing of freed slaves is probably also extinct. In 2000, Genell Anderson made a study of the log structure built by Robert Banneker, Guinea-born father of Benjamin Banneker. Unfortunately, only verbal references to to “an humble cabin” were recorded by people who visited Banneker at that long extinct house near Oella. The question arose, would a native of Guinea be more influenced by the building techniques of the Swedes and Finns than by his own traditions, especially in almost-frontier like Old Frederick Road in 1737? This puzzle was thoroughly discussed in planning a memorial “cabin” at Banneker Park. Almost no other African-born slaves were free to build houses in traditional trans-Atlantic style.

One of Francis Guy’s 1805 paintings of the Perry Hall estate showed white, one-and-two-story quarters dwellings, possibly brick painted white, but more likely frame buildings, in a picturesque setting that looks like a hollow-square layout (Colwill, 1981, p. 61). Perry Hall also had its own slave jail, a small, square stone structure with a cupola; it was equipped with a pit too deep

for anyone confined there to climb out; this private jail survived on the Lacey Farm at 4014 Perry Hall Road until 1913.



*Jenkins Homestead
Building on Left is Slave Quarters*

The slave houses reported in the course of surveying Baltimore County include: (1) one at the house called Garrison at 3511 Anton Farms Court, (2) a stone slave house of ca. 1798 at Prospect Hill overlooking Long Green Valley, (3) a two-story house identified by H. Chandlee Forman as a “quarters” at Hereford Farm, (4) a frame slave house at Green Spring near Garrison Forest Road listed in the 1798 tax list as “one old Negro house, one-story, 24 x 24, (5) the “Slave Mess Hall at Hayfields on Shawan Road that was converted into a golf cart storage garage, and, (6) the stone slave houses at the old Hampton Farm House cluster on the north side of Hampton Lane; those slave houses were new about 1860. In addition, the 1695 Garrison Fort was being used as a “Negro House” when measured during the 1798 tax listing; it was a stone building with an enormous hearth, much larger than a small family would have needed. A hand-me-down fort was probably better than most worn outbuildings relegated to the workforce. Although slavery was losing ground in Baltimore County, the last slave holders were convinced practitioners. Just before the Civil War, there was a slave owners association of which Richard Worthington of Worthington Valley was president. A complete study of slave houses was published by Kimberly R. Abe in 2005 (See Bibliography).