

GERMAN-INFLUENCED HOUSES

The north end of the county contains many sturdy houses that in some indefinable way resemble structures common to Pennsylvania, Carroll County, and the Shenandoah Valley. The unifying and obvious thread is the influence of Pennsylvania-German building techniques, not of the earliest settlement period but of the prosperous times of the early 19th century. There are apparently no German style houses surviving from Baltimore County's 18th century, none of those houses with the chimney set in the middle, so distinct from the British house type with chimneys at each gable end of the dwelling. Frederick County has one such first generation house on U.S. 15, a stone structure called Scheverstadt which dates from about 1756. A somewhat similar structure near Woodsboro in Frederick County called Mill Pond House was recorded by H. Chandlee Forman in 1953 shortly before its collapse. Both houses had vaulted basements, possibly for food storage. Christopher Weeks in his *Buildings of Westminster*, reported that no central-chimney house survived the urbanization of Westminster, nor were any found in the surrounding county nor even in collections of local photographs. Such houses were in a Medieval style out of fashion in cities but still followed by "folk architects" in the 1700s (*Weeks*, 1978, pp. 13-18).

A number of large houses were built by the Hoffman family at the north end of Baltimore County. The founder of the family came from Pennsylvania but was a native of Frankfurt-am-Main and had started paper manufacturing at the headwaters of the Gunpowder in 1776. Reservoir development at Prettyboy destroyed much of the cluster called Hoffmanville. Family traditions hold that the main family house was built in 1795, but the 1798 tax list showed only a one-story house composed of one segment of log and one of stone. Eventually, a large brick mansion sprang up at Hoffman's Gunpowder Paper Mills; this was two segments of brick, one block quite low, the other two stories with double-decker porches all across the main facade facing the river. As shown in 19th century photographs, the great house was probably Georgian or Federal under its cluttered galleries; the attics were lighted by typical Georgian dormers. At Clipper Paper Mill, the other family factory, the owner's mansion was large but extremely primitive, not even medieval, but composed of a pair of two-story segments with gable roofing and crude riven-board roof covering. More like a German barn, the house loomed large on the scene in an old photograph and its full reflection appeared on the surface of the mill pond. A third Hoffman house, well away from the river north of Mount Tabor Church, was a brick, cross-gabled mansion in a combination of heavy Victorian Gothic, and Pennsylvania-German.

The German-influenced house of the 19th century is obviously a distinct style or substyle, but architectural books usually fail to list it. The German style is clearly a plain and sturdy variation of the Federal. There is a great amount of glass visible on a German-Federal house. Five bays of large sash windows on the second story usually leave very little wall visible between the frames or above the lintels. The rural houses usually have a full-width front porch, four large sash windows and a massively heavily framed center door with rectangular transom and sometimes sidelights. There is usually a deep rear wing called an "ell," or as advertisements often put it, a "back building." The rear wing often had full-length porches at two levels, looking into an inner yard. Quite often the gable ends of these houses had no window openings except in the attic where small square windows were set on either side of the inside chimneys. Sometimes there were four sash windows in the gable ends, but the builder almost always included the small attic end windows. German style houses often had no dormers in front. Houses repaired late in the 19th century have standing-seam metal roofing, often painted green or deep red. The German style house was superbly constructed, often by imported craftsmen from Pennsylvania. The John Bacon Pearce house on Irish Lane, on part of the

manor Clynmalira, was built about 1810 by a York County carpenter (Isaac The native Germans in many cases were descendants of Swiss immigrants to the Rhineland-Pfaltz region, having settled there after the German population was vastly reduced by the Thirty Years' War. Coming to Maryland was the third or fourth move in a great migration spanning a number of generations. Prosser of Shrewsbury) who left his name scrawled on a timber. Some of the brick houses of Monkton, the hotel, station master's dwelling, and the replacement mill of 1859, were commissioned by the Pennsylvania native Samuel Miller and constructed by his imported craftsmen from north of the State line.

The strongly German houses built in the Federal era lacked the lightness and even delicacy of the Federal-Adamesque style. German house elements, the frames, sashes, balusters and bannisters were much sturdier than the same parts in either Federal or Georgian houses. Like the Hoffman Paper Mill owner's house, the German house often had two-decker porches across the entire facade giving it a hotel-like appearance, but a Pennsylvania double-decker house would never be mistaken for a Natchez or New Orleans galleried inn.

There is no doubt that Germans came into the north county via Pennsylvania rather than through the port of Baltimore. Family researches usually find relatives on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. One of the farthest north Baltimore County mills was on the tract Curfmanstadt surveyed sometime before 1794 for Daniel Curfman who had York County connections. His name was spelled Kirkman on Dennis Griffith's 1794-1795 map of Maryland and Delaware. The land in the north county had been kept back from settlement as a reserve for the Lords Baltimore until the early 1770s when Pennsylvania's growing population was seeking new and empty frontiers. As early as 1732, the Lord Proprietor had offered cheap land in Frederick County to encourage the migration of thrifty German farmers as far west as possible. Thus north Baltimore County was passed over for settlement for almost 40 years. German names found in the north end of Baltimore County include Shamberger, Beckley, Hoffman, Curfman, Hoffacker, Hoshall, Kone, Louck, Houck, Shauck, Zouck, Wilhelm, Palmer, Alban, Cotter, Fultzer, Hilker, Kerschner, Shaver, Young, Caltrider, Winehold, Ebersole, Lohr, Baublitz, Bollinger, Zeigler, Henry, Resh, Gott, Swam, and Wolf, just to name an obvious few from the Hopkins atlas of 1877. Probably many names that look British at first glance are of German origin, disguised by phonetic spelling.

Settlers with Swiss and German heritage were not burdened with a craving to establish English estates, balanced groups of outbuildings, or Palladian gardens. Nor did a democratic farming population crave the formality of German Baroque estates, strictly the domain of the barons and landgrafs they probably detested at home. The craftsman who installed the magical plaster decorations of baroque salons and churches either never emigrated or never found any clients among the Protestant religious groups who came to America. Most of the Germans were members of sects that avoided decorated churches; bare walls and hard board benches expressed the outlook of German Baptists, although Lutherans liked well carved benches and sturdy railings and pulpits.

The German homestead, once settled, was a fine display of great barns dominating lush meadows and extensive cleared fields. Late in the 18th century, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a "signer" from Pennsylvania, wrote that the Pennsylvania German's massive barn dominated the "plain but compact form of the house" and the farm always produced a scene of neatness and order. Less order was possible in gorges and ravines, such as the setting of Gunpowder Paper Mill where geology provided only one suitable place for a working mill, leaving any other unwanted flat area for the owner's residence. The mill bottoms made up for their disorder with picturesqueness, a quality that was readily discernible to the end of the Age of Reason. In England, John Constable often painted mill scenes and the Dutch landscape artists, unburdened by any theories, had been painting wind and water mills for centuries.

Houses sitting on high, walk-in basements, such as the Resh Mill dwelling, are probably in German style. A high, ground-floor space in a formal brick or stone house would be described as an “English basement,” but in an ordinary farm house, the layout is similar to that of a bank barn set into the slope of a steep hillside. Many up-county houses have two front doors which is sometimes explained as providing a regular door and a rarely used “coffin door” reserved for the final exit of family members. More likely, these houses were divided into two units for groups of relatives or hired men. With two front doors, as with four-bay house widths, it was impossible to achieve Palladian balance, but that was obviously not very important to the builders and their clients.

In an article entitled “The Riddle of Two Front Doors,” Henry J. Kauffman wrote in 1954 that the double doors resulted from a more compact house design that eliminated the center hall and located the stairway at the back of the house. This plan was most prevalent from 1840 to 1860 although an early example dated from 1823. The house owners acquired two front rooms, one of which was treated as the best parlor, closed most of the time and used only for “occasions”: receiving guests and family groups, church meetings, courting, weddings, and funerals. Each room opening onto the porch needed access, and the best room was too good to use for household traffic as a substitute for the vanished center hall. (See reprint in *Early American Folklife*, February 1994, Vol. 25:43). Ken Short, former historic site planner for Carroll County, stated that there were at least five theories to explain the double front door layout (*Sun*, July 23, 1995).

Some German-looking houses were built for clients of British or Irish descent because Pennsylvania craftsmen were often hired when Scottish and Irish carpenters were not available. The German style crept into north end churches too, perhaps not as obviously as in dwelling houses.

The Maryland-Pennsylvania-German style in the 1860s adopted some of the decorative elements of the Italianate style: the brackets and heavy wooden cornices, and in some cases it combined Italianate decorations and hooded window frames with the front cross-gables from the Gothic Revival tradition. These houses were closer to the ground, not perched on high basements. The result was a somewhat heavily laden but solid house, usually with a broad front porch and many windows. The home of the paper manufacturer William Henkle Hoffman at Hoffmanville was a good example of the brick, bracketed, and cross-gabled mansion, built in 1867, unfortunately extinct.

The Daniel Beckley house at Beckleysville, another paper making village, mixed elaborate hooded windows with bracketed cornice and bracketed eaves, square Greek Revival attic windows, and rear wing double-decker porches. This house, dating from ca. 1860, was hand-somely restored in 1991.

The German style house often became rambling in its rear and side wings. Practical, flat-roofed extensions and cat-slide shed roofing often solved the problem of providing more space quickly. The rich collection of Pennsylvania German folk culture at Landis Valley in Lancaster County is displayed in some spacious houses and outbuildings where the elegant starter-house has been forgotten in the rush to add more useable space. The Dr. Ephraim Bell house at Maryland Line (1831-1833) has a spacious, flat-roofed rear section and the side walls are three full stories of frame and clapboard, fully as tall as the roof ridge of the brick main block of the house.

German-Gothic-Italianate was probably the last discernible regional style. Subsequent styles were popularized by nationwide publications and mail-order plans, shutting out most localized designs. Marylanders were willing to commission California and Florida houses, but Californians and Floridians had no craving for authentic Pennsylvania-Maryland-German houses. Nowhere in the parade of revivalism did any architect revive the authentic central-chimney German house of the 18th century.

GRISTMILLS

Gristmill architecture was usually functional, merely providing a shelter for the storage and grinding of grain, yet most large mills were pleasing to the eye, with balanced window arrangements and a setting on or near a millstream. The natural good taste of millwrights is attested by the number of artists attracted to mill locations to draw or paint a dramatic man-made landscape as a place of beauty, unlike modern photographers who record factories and junkyards as a form of social comment.

The location of the mill was dependent on finding a stream that could be dammed and channeled to a point where the water could be dropped at least 8 feet to power a mill wheel. The site also had to allow the used water to drain away downstream rather than form a sluggish puddle that would slow the rotation of the wheel. The mill canal or millrace sometimes followed the contours of the hillsides at a constant level for as much as a mile before a dropping point could be found—which determined the location of the desired mill.

*Owings Upper Mill
or Groff's Mill*



The first examples of mills were probably tub mills also called Norse or Swedish mills, small structures about 12 by 14 feet where the water gushed under the one-room building and struck a waterwheel set horizontally in the basement. The wheel was permanently attached to a vertical shaft that passed through the floor into the mill where it drove the permanently attached “runner” millstone of the two-millstone set, one moveable, one fixed in place, that together ground the grain. The force of the water caused the tubmill wheel to rotate.

Some placenames in colonial documents suggest that the earliest settlers were trying to develop mills even on the very low terrain of Patapsco Neck. “Corbin’s Mill” was mentioned in the 1697 will of Nicholas Corbin bequeathing property near present Bear Creek bridge. A tract called “Bread and Cheese Mill” on a creek of the same name was surveyed in 1733.

Possibly there were grain-grinding windmills in the low tidal regions but the only one that can be illustrated was at Fells Point, shown in George Beck’s 1796 painting of Baltimore and its harbor. A windmill was shown on Sidney’s 1850 map at German Hill and Trappe Roads. Tax records show that it belonged to a black man, named Isaac Rolles in 1846. Further inland, Jonathan Hanson’s mill was built in 1711 on Jones Falls, before laying out Baltimore Town, at what is now Franklin and Holliday Streets, under the expressway. Milford Mill near Pikesville can be documented at 1728, and a tract called “Bond’s Water Mills” was surveyed on both sides of Little Gunpowder Falls in 1725. Even more intriguing, is the existence of a mill already old and dilapidated in 1733, on the east bank of Little Gunpowder Falls at a site selected for Stephen Onion’s new mill.

By the 1740s, mills seemed to be scattered everywhere, but illustrations are non-existent, their dimensions unknown. In 1772, on two local streams, enterprising Quaker Pennsylvanians from Bucks County were building remarkably large mills in the Little Gunpowder Falls valley near Kingsville-Franklinville and on the Patapsco Falls at a nameless “hollow” that soon became “Ellicotts Lower Mills” and is now the Baltimore County side of Ellicott City. This generation of mills is well documented and photographs and graphics survive. On the Little Gunpowder Falls, eight mills were designed and built by Isaiah Linton, another Bucks County migrant, and his masterpiece, Jerusalem Mill, still stands. At Ellicott City, the Ellicott brothers designed and constructed their own mills (Linton, 1988).

A possible mystery of early mill design is the difference, if any, between mills designed by German-born immigrant millwrights and those built by Britons and Native Americans. The earliest generation of such mills would have been rendered obsolete by the well-capitalized merchant mills of the 1770s and after, thus there is little left for comparison. Possibly German-style mills were lower and broader with more steeply pitched roofs, like mills still to be seen in rural Bavaria. The best-documented non-British mills are those built by the Moravians at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, starting about 1745. Maryland residents were not such meticulous record keepers.

Mills were largely clear open space inside, except for grain storage bins. A row of posts usually ran through the center of each story to support the girts that supported the floor above. Even with such powerful framing, mills were known to bulge and collapse under the weight of the grain.

All American mills began to resemble each other in dimensions and layout after the 1795 publication of Oliver Evans’ *Young-Mill-Wright*, which showed where to mount the water wheel, millstones, and sifting devices, and provided a bill of materials for constructing a basic mill. Many mills seem to be 36 feet wide as prescribed by the Evans book. That particular chapter had been written by Thomas Ellicott of Bucks County. After millers everywhere accepted the hoisting and sifting inventions patented by Oliver Evans—the inventor for all practical purposes of automation—mills only differed in their outer materials and random decorative features. The big mills faintly reflected the architectural styles for dwellings. Samuel Owings’ 1793 Upper Mill was a simplified Federal style, while later mills were decked out with bargeboards and clutter from the Downing-Vaux era; for example, the bright and beautiful Otterdale Mill in Carroll County. Since there are already books on the history and technology of Baltimore County mills, only a few sites will be presented. As the consulting millwright, John B. Campbell stated on a 1975 visit, all mills are “the same from Maine to Georgia.”



Owings Upper Mill or Groff’s Mill



Owings Middle Mill

OWINGS MIDDLE MILL

Several years after the 1980 publication of *Gristmills of Baltimore County*, a painting marked “Mill on Reister’s Town Road” turned up in a Howard Street antique shop and is the only known illustration of Owings Middle Mill. The work was executed by some Sunday painter, perhaps, who took the trip on the Westminster Branch of the Baltimore and Susquehanna during the many years when the tracks ended at a depot opposite the Middle Mill. This mill was the only one directly on the road, and the painting shows a substantial three-arch stone bridge over Gwynns Falls built by the turnpike company. The 1828 plat of the Owings property showed that the water race for that mill passed south of the mill building and south of Conn’s Tavern, the frame house shown in the background of the painting. In 1828, there had been a separate mill on each side of the race, one for grinding grain, the other for crushing gypsum into plaster for building and agricultural purposes. The Middle Mill was the only Owings works shown on Griffith’s 1794 map of Maryland and Delaware; it was aligned with the turnpike, suggesting that it was built after the 1787 survey for straightening out the old meandering road to Hanover, Pennsylvania. In 1845, the Middle Mill was described by a witness in a court proceeding as in a ruinous state. The same witness was later appointed trustee to sell the property, and in writing his newspaper sales advertisement disguised the sad condition of the place—it has been standing open and cattle were wandering into it. Various traditions hold that (1) the mill was demolished and its brick used to build the nearby Reese house in 1849, and (2) that it was used as a dwelling by Mrs. Fannie B. Harmon, who operated the Owings Mills post office until the railroad acquired the site about 1907 to build a coal hopper. The coal hopper could still be seen in 1980. In the 1798 tax list, the mill had measured 50 by 44 feet.

OWINGS UPPER MILL

The brick mill that survives on the east side of Reisterstown Road, on Bonita Avenue, was the last one built by Samuel Owings as revealed in his Will. Various deeds of 1793 show that he was acquiring water rights from landowners upstream. He bought Welles Mill, probably for its water rights, because it was not carried in the 1798 tax list. The Upper Mill was big, 50 by 60 feet, and is the only Maryland mill that had a projecting bay or pavilion to house the three tiers of loading doors that are the most characteristic feature of mill architecture. Probably built to the Oliver Evans system from the start, it is framed with massive supporting posts, and the floor supports, or girts, are cushioned from the posts by large tapered blocks called bolsters. The bolsters are anchored to the girts by wooden dowels about an inch in diameter. The mill design is too functional to be classified as fully Georgian or Federal in style, but there is a box cornice and a water table; sash windows are regularly spaced in the long dimensions.

In 1813, William Owings offered to lease his Upper Mill as a cotton factory, stating in a newspaper item, “Gentlemen of experience in the Cotton Works say this situation is excelled by none, and if the Mill House had been originally designed for such works, it could not be better constructed.” In the 1820s some of the family dickered with Michael McBlair, a partner in Maryland Manufacturing Company at Jericho, about starting a cotton factory but could not get unanimous consent from all parties.

In 1848, the mill passed out of the founding family into the hands of Francis B., Abraham E., and Jacob B. Groff, whose collateral descendants still owned it in 2000. By 1854, the

Groffs had renamed it Eureka Mills, probably reflecting the California Gold Rush, and the wording “Eureka Mills” was worked into the south facade by inserting purple bricks. The Groffs also platted out a town to be called “Eureka,” which was never developed.

Owings Upper Mill



A fourth Groff brother, Benjamin F. Groff, took sole title in 1856. An engineer worthy to succeed Samuel Owings, B. F. Groff did away with the outside water wheel and put in an underground turbine. The water was channeled to the turbine pit through cast-iron water main sections declared surplus by Baltimore City. The motion generated by the turbine shaft was brought into the building by belting that drove a master pulley, which in turn drove everything else.

In 1888, Groff put in steel roller units that replaced the millstones and in 1893 remodeled “to the Wolf system.” The family still has the metal stencils for painting the brand names on the barrels of “Eureka Mills Roller Process Family” flour. B. F. Groff died in 1895, and his widow, Elizabeth Denmead Groff, rented the place to tenant operators. Her son, Guy B. Groff, ran it for a while.

In 1906, William D. Groff, took over, only to have the water rights condemned the following year to permit the Western Maryland to realign its tracks. Mrs. Groff, still the owner, testified in court that she would accept the railroad’s offer because there was almost no demand for small country mills. William D. Groff, Sr., used the building for a feed and fuel business that is still continued by his grandson, William D. Groff, III, making four generations on the premises. Most of the mill equipment was sold, but there are still cavernous bins, hoists, pulleys, chutes, balance scales, a Eureka Smut Machine; and even globs of grease applied sometime before 1907. A favorite sight for school children visiting Eureka Mill is a mummified cat found in the basement and nailed up on a beam. The mill, Baltimore County’s oldest survivor, was accepted on the National Register of Historic Places in September of 1978.

MILL TOWNS

Manufacturing villages began in 1731 with the establishment of the Baltimore Iron Works Company at the mouth of Gwynns Falls. There are no illustrations of that village, nor of those at Kingsbury, Lancashire, White March, Northampton or Onion’s Furnaces. The housing must be assumed to have been rudimentary, since most of the workmen were slaves, convicts, or indentured servants.

The textile towns that began in 1808 started with distinctively local architecture in both its manufacturing buildings and its residences. The economic opening provided by Jefferson’s Embargo in 1807 brought many hopeful investors into that was called “domestic manufacturing,” that is, the making of consumer goods in the United States rather than importing them from Europe. The low

cost of British textiles had undercut all early efforts at establishing American cotton and woolen production from Independence to 1807.

The textile manufacturers expected to be in business for a long time and built large, sturdy mills and sound enduring housing. Many of the organizers of the Embargo generation of mills were Quakers and no doubt they selected designs both functional and simple. The first few mills in Baltimore County at Union Manufacturing Company and Washington Factory (Mount Washington) were built before there were any American models to imitate. The first two mills of 1808 and 1809 were more or less double or triple the size of the largest local merchant grist mills, designed to provide plenty of daylight, air, and open floor space. In those days the British government was trying to keep textile machinery, drawings of machinery, and living experts from leaving the United Kingdom. The original investors of Union Factory had no knowledge of manufacturing, but managed to find British subjects to plan and operate the mills. In 1840, John S. Tyson wrote that when the 1808 investors had advertised for experts, a Scotsman, Matthew Waddle or Waddell, had answered their call with a full set of ready drawn plans. The first mill at Oella or Union was completed by 1809 and functioned reasonably well. A second mill was ready by 1811 and both buildings appear in a drawing by Maximilian Godefroy. No mill in New England was quite so large at the time. The Washington Factory and the Powhatan Factory were also long multi-story buildings of brick or stone. Washington Factory was designed by a water engineer, John Davis, who also designed and supervised the construction of mill races and reservoirs. The characteristic stair towers of textile mills appeared in America in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, in the 1820s. Baltimore County's first mill with a tower was the Elysville Factory, where the tower was first tacked onto an existing mill building about 1849-1850. By the 1850s, mills all over the country began to resemble each other because their owners subscribed to national fire insurance regulations. The so-called slow-burning construction of mills, featuring double strength flooring and extra heavy supporting posts appeared in Massachusetts about 1828, a technique imported from the Manchester cotton industry of Lancashire.

The second Union Factory was gambrel-roofed, a design possibly imported from a mill at Styal in England. When the first Union building burned in 1815, it was rebuilt as a gambrel-roofed structure. Both mills endured to 1918, when there was a disastrous fire blamed on an exploding electric bulb.

The housing of mill villages is much like town and country houses anywhere in the county. At Union, the houses were multi-family stone rows, with a separate duplex house for the storekeeper. In the 1820s or so, a long serpentine row of houses was added to the town and wound up hill and curved with the Union Factory Road. "Long Brick Row" was a 19-unit row in orange brick, more simplified than Baltimore City's Federal-style row houses, rather British in flavor. Washington Factory village had a number of brick rows that stood until 1958. Thistle Factory's crowded village was described by visitors as Welsh in appearance, although its founders, Fridge and Morris were Scots. Warren, founded in 1815, had long stone rows that endured until 1922.

The mill town housing often included a splendid dwelling for the owner or resident manager. The best house and the second best houses were usually on the highest hilltop or on its upper slopes. The owners at Elysville and Patapsco Factory neglected to build on the high ground, and James Sullivan Gary barely escaped the 1868 flood, and at Patapsco, John Pendleton Kennedy's house was swept clean of its valuable library and art collection.

A hilltop arrangement of owner, managers, and workmen was practically an organization chart worked out in geography. After the supervisor, the most valuable employees were machinists and mule spinners. Having them in flood-proof housing was good insurance. The women and children who merely replaced filled-up bobbins and watched for broken thread were the lowest level, the ones most easily replaced by quickly trained substitutes. A multi-level mill village like Franklinville, Wetheredville, or Warren—as well as the mill clusters in Jones Falls Valley, made a fine view for artists. The owners or managers often had splendidly landscaped grounds, and at Franklinville and Clipper Mill, there were spacious artificial terraces. The manufacturing meritocracy was a strictly controlled society, and with the various churches provided by the mill companies, the cotton towns probably resembled the heavenly city of *Pilgrim's Progress* as they came into sight of early train travelers.

Fielding Lucas, in an 1832 guidebook, dwelt on the beauty of Thistle Factory:

The tall factory of yellowish hue, with those neat build-ings of stone, scattered on the hillside above it, with their gardens and shady trees, and the dashing and unquiet mill dam that casts its silver sheet before you in the sunlight, with its unceasing flickering of light and shade—all these belong to the Thistle Factory.

J. Hyland, who advertised the Ilchester Hotel in the *American* of June 29, 1837, was probably also thinking of romantic paintings, saying that the hotel was in “the wildest and most picturesque scenery anywhere to be met with on the Patapsco, and in view of that noble structure, the Patterson Viaduct.”

