



History Trails

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Mount Airy

by William Hollifield

The property near Towson where Sheppard-Pratt Hospital is now located was once a country estate called Mount Airy.

The estate was composed of two land grants – "Lane's Triangle" and "Ridgely's Fancy." The latter was a 300-acre tract first granted to Dutton Lane in 1695. In 1746 Dutton and Samuel Lane sold part of "Lane's Triangle" and part of "Lane's Venture" to Charles Ridgely for 70 pounds sterling. Adjacent was a tract called "The Fancy," 50 acres that had been granted to James Boreing in 1734. Apparently Charles Ridgely had his land resurveyed; he received patents to "Ridgely's Fancy," 113 acres, in 1747, and "Lane's Triangle", 297 acres, in 1765.

The beginning point of both the "Lane's Triangle" and "Ridgely's Fancy" tracts was near a spring known as Surveyors Spring, located north of the intersection of present-day Bellona Avenue and Stevenson Lane, about where the property of Towson State University joins that which until recently was owned by the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

The Charles Ridgely who acquired this property was born about 1700 and died in 1772. He was known as Colonel Ridgely and Charles Ridgely the Merchant, to distinguish him from other members of his family of the same name. He was also a plantation owner and had acquired 8,000 acres in Anne Arundel and Baltimore Counties. He served in the Maryland legislature from 1751 to 1754. With his sons, John and Charles, he established the Northampton Furnace and Forges in the early 1760s. In 1760 he conveyed over 2,000 acres to his son Charles (1733-1790) who was known as Captain Charles Ridgely. It was he who built the Hampton mansion.

Rachel Ridgely (1734-1813), a daughter of Colonel Charles Ridgely and sister of Captain Charles of Hampton, married Darby Lux in 1764. In 1767, for the nominal sum of five shillings sterling and for "the natural Love and Affection which he hath and beareth towards" Darby and Rachel Lux, Colonel Charles granted them the "Ridgely's Fancy" and "Lane's Triangle" tracts. Interestingly, he included their young son, his grandson, in the deed (this might have been common practice for a will but was unusual for a deed). The property was given to Darby and Rachel Lux "during their natural lives and to the survivor of them during the life of such survivor and from and after the decease of such survivor to him the said William Lux and the heirs of his body forever." In 1768, the Luxes built a two-story house on the property.

Darby Lux was the son of Captain Darby Lux who had lived in Baltimore on the lane that became Light Street. The street was



— Maryland Historical Society

The Mount Airy mansion when it was owned by the Sheppard Asylum Trustees and was apparently unoccupied. This picture, the only one known, was donated to the Maryland Historical Society by Dr. J. Hall Pleasants, a Poultrney descendant, in 1935.

named for him, "light" being the translation of the Latin word "lux."

The younger Darby Lux was a merchant in Barbadoes about 1764. After his marriage, he became a partner in Ridgely, Howard and Lux, the Ridgely family's ironworks. He was appointed, under the will of his father-in-law, the trustee of the one-third share of the business inherited by his wife and her two sisters. He and the Ridgelys and others in 1782 purchased property of the Nottingham Forge which had been confiscated by the state as British property, and in 1785 he and the Ridgelys bought land that had been confiscated by the state from the Principio Company. During the Revolution, he had been involved in a Baltimore County lead mining operation.

Just before the Revolution, Darby Lux had served on the county's Committee of Observation in 1774, and he was a justice in the county in 1774-75. From 1777 until his resignation in 1779, he was colonel of the Gunpowder Battalion of the Baltimore County Militia. Later he was a county tax commissioner, 1783-1786.

Darby Lux died in 1795. His widow Rachel was listed as the owner of the Mount Airy property in a 1798 assessment record.

The occupant of the property, however, was her son Darby Lux. There were 16 slaves there — 12 belonging to Rachel and four belonging to Darby. The main house was a two-story stone structure measuring 20 by 22 feet. Also on the property were a frame house measuring 16 by 30 feet, a log building for the slaves, an old log stable, a lumber house, and three hen houses.

Darby Lux, the son of Darby and Rachel, died in 1812. The inventory of his estate showed that wheat, rye, hay, and flax had been grown on the farm. There were also potatoes, turnips, beans, a lot of "indifferent" corn, and some timothy seed. The livestock consisted of seven horses and two colts, a cow, a heifer, a white bull, a sow and ten pigs, a hog, and a boar. There were the usual farming implements and a parcel of old carpenter's tools as well as an old wheel for spinning wool and an old linen wheel.

The slaves were listed by name:

James, about 24	\$280
Ned, about 22	300
Joe, about 13	280
John, about 12	250
Philip, about 3	50
Harriot, about 22 (and child)	200
Nell, about 46	50
Sall, about 9	150
Miranda, 10	150

A revised inventory completed 16 months later listed the slaves as:

James, 25	\$300
Philip, 4	50
Harriet, 23, and child	200
Nell, 53	25

Darby's widow, Mary, died in 1813, and the property passed to their son William. A tax list of 1813 showed that William Lux had only one horse there which was valued at \$20. The buildings were assessed at \$100 and the land at \$4 an acre.

The same year, William Lux sold the Mount Airy property, 327 3/4 acres, to Thomas Poultney of Baltimore. The price given in the deed was \$11,772, but Mr. Poultney in May 1814 also paid off the balance of a mortgage that William Lux owed to his uncle, James McCormick, Jr. Poultney had also mortgaged the Mount Airy property to Lux, agreeing to make three annual payments totaling \$8,829. These payments had been made by September 1815 when the mortgage was redeemed.

Mr. Poultney also added three lots to his property, which he purchased from Thomas Jackson, owner of the adjacent farm. These lots, totaling over 5 1/2 acres, were bought for \$288 during the years 1813-1815. They were part of the "Hale's Fellowship" tract.

Thomas Poultney was a Quaker merchant from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He moved to Alexandria, Virginia, in 1789 and the following year he married Ann, the daughter of Evan Thomas. They settled in Baltimore about 1791 and he established a hardware business. The business was on Baltimore Street between St. Paul and Charles Streets, and the family's town house was nearby on St. Paul Street near Baltimore Street. The business was so successful that he amassed a fortune and was able to retire from active participation about 1807 at the age of 45. The firm then became known as Poultney and Thomas. By the early 1820s, his sons became partners and the firm was known as Thomas Poultney and Sons.

Mount Airy was the Poultney family's country estate. An article in the *Baltimore Sun* in 1905 described it as having been "picturesque in the extreme." The house overlooked a series of rolling hills and the property was magnificently wooded. Its poplar trees were especially admired. Mount Airy was said to have been "celebrated

in its palmy days"; many of the city's elite were entertained there. As the Poultney children grew up, they built summer cottages nearby, forming a family compound.

Thomas Poultney died in 1828. The inventory of his estate, completed in mid-1829, showed farm produce on hand of 60 bushels of rye, 25 tons of hay, and four of straw. There were 15 acres then planted in rye.

The farm also had three horses, a mare, a colt, nine cows, two calves, a bull, seven hogs, and two hives of bees. There were a set of dairy implements, a cider press, a set of carpenter's tools, and two rollers and a road scoop, in addition to the regular farming implements and household furnishings. There were no slaves.

The greater part of Thomas Poultney's assets consisted of stock in local corporations, the most significant of which were his 104 shares in the Bank of Maryland which were valued at a total of \$24,960 and his 17 shares of Baltimore Insurance stock which were worth \$4,930. He also owned stock in the Reisterstown and Frederick turnpike companies, and, of nominal value, a few shares of the Boonsboro turnpike stock.

Assessment records showed that the value of the land and house increased considerably during the years the Poultney's owned it. The house was valued at \$400 in 1823, \$1,000 in 1833, and \$3,000 in 1841. The land consisted of 327 acres assessed at \$1,635 in 1823, 340 acres assessed at \$5,100 in 1833, and 368 acres assessed at \$14,720 in 1841.

In 1823 there was furniture in the house assessed at \$10 and two carriages worth \$60. Later assessment records did not list furniture or carriages, leading to the conclusion that the members of the family probably used Mount Airy only in the summer and ordinarily kept most of their property in their city homes.

The assessment records show the following farm animals at Mount Airy over the years:

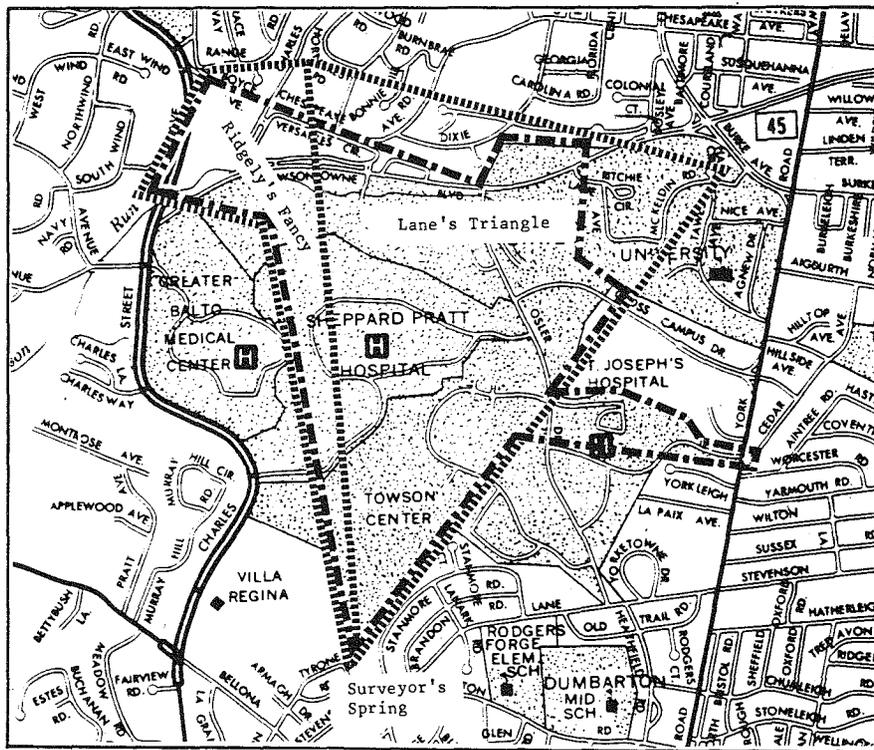
	1823	1833	1841
Horses	6	3	2
Black cattle	7	7	4
Hogs	5	5	—
Sheep	8	—	—

In July 1858, Mrs. Rachel Poultney Brown and Philip Poultney, both of Baltimore, children of Thomas Poultney and the trustees of his estate, sold the then 340 1/2-acre Mount Airy tract to the trustees of the Sheppard Asylum for \$60,000. Of this amount, \$58,000 went to the Poultney estate and \$2,000 directly to Rachel P. Brown for a small portion of the property she had acquired in 1855.

Following the sale of the property, Philip Poultney's livestock, farming implements, and crops were offered at a public sale at Mount Airy in March 1859. The livestock consisted of six work horses, eight milk cows, three two-year-old heifers, a two-year-old bull, nine yearlings, two brood sows, a boar, and a lot of shoats. The equipment included two heavy broad-tread wagons, a yoke of oxen and cart, a two-horse spring wagon and harness, plows, harrows, single and double shovels, cultivators, a four-horse threshing machine, a seed drill, wheat fan, cutting box, corn sheller, and a horse rake. Also offered were hay, straw, corn, potatoes, and about 50 acres of grain in the ground. These items were advertised for sale by Benjamin Vanhorn, who served as the manager of the Sheppard Asylum farm for many years.

The Sheppard Asylum was incorporated in 1853. Its founder, Moses Sheppard, died in 1857. The trustees of the institution, after considering many locations, purchased the Mount Airy tract. Another 35 acres were added to connect with Charles Street Avenue which had been recently extended.

The property was found to contain good clay for making bricks and also to contain building stone. The construction contractor built two large kilns so that a million bricks could be made, and



----- ORIGINAL LAND GRANTS
 - - - - - MOUNT AIRY PROPERTY AS ACQUIRED BY SHEPPARD ASYLUM TRUSTEES

The Mount Airy property and the original land grants of which it was comprised, platted by George Horvath, Jr., and drawn by Robert C. Spicer. Both the "Lane's Triangle" and "Ridgely's Fancy" tracts began at the "Surveyors Spring," which still forms a property corner in 1990.

a quarry was established to excavate the stone for use in foundations and stairways in the hospital.

The property was landscaped with ornamental trees and shrubbery, an orchard of 334 trees was planted, and the farm fields were prepared for planting. The stone gatehouse on Charles Street was built in 1860.

In 1862, farm buildings and other buildings were begun (barn, stables, granaries, carriage and wagon sheds, repair shop, and several farm houses). The farm was expected to provide food for the patients, though the hospital was not completed for many years. The first patient was admitted in 1891.

Construction of the hospital's main building was begun in 1862 and it progressed slowly over the years because only the interest from Moses Sheppard's endowment was to be used to finance it. People of the time, aware of the slowness of the construction, used to say, "When the Sheppard is finished, I'll do it," to explain their own procrastinations.

The Western Division of the large building was completed in 1871 and right away excavation for the Eastern Division was begun. The Mount Airy mansion was located where this wing was to be built so the old house had to be removed.

An item in the *Maryland Journal* (published in Towson) of December 7, 1872, reported the demolition of the Mount Airy house:

ANOTHER OLD LANDMARK GONE — A day or so since, it became necessary to tear down the old Poultney stone mansion upon the Sheppard Asylum property, near this town, in order to make way for the foundation of the second wing of the immense building now in course of erection there. In tearing down the walls a stone was taken out of the outer wall bearing the inscription 1768, which would make the house 104 years old. Two old English coins were found among the rubbish. The walls of this old building were quite massive, and put up in that substantial manner incident to that age.

This item prompted a local resident to write to the paper to provide some reminiscences relating to Mount Airy and its former owners:

Noticing in your last issue the reference to the removal of of the "Old Mansion" at Mount Airy, now held by Trustees of Sheppard Asylum, I am induced to give a few facts as regards the proprietorship, antecedent to its purchase by Mr. Poultney. The "Old Mansion" was built by Darby Lux, who, one hundred years ago, was the representative of a large and wealthy family. He was a member of the Legislature,

or Council, in 1776, which pronounced against the King. The leading men in our part of the State at that time were Captain Charles Ridgely, who built the princely mansion at Hampton, Thomas Cockey Deye and Darby Lux, the first and last being near relatives. Bitter political contests were frequent between Deye on one side and Ridgely and Lux upon the other. Darby Lux, Jr., succeeded to the proprietorship of Mount Airy, from whom it passed to Mr. Poultney. The name of Lux has not only an honorable record in the State, but also in Church, having largely contributed to the property of St. Paul's Parish. The only son of the late Darby Lux, William, resides now in Texas. Two of his daughters, now deceased, married and settled in Queen Anne's county, another, being the wife of Thomas D. Cockey, of Thos., now residing in this county.

The writer was identified only as "J.M." Two weeks later, J.M. wrote again to point out a misspelled name and to record the following about nearby property owners and their families:

... I am inclined to give you "what I know" about the vicinity of Towsontown, but fear it will require more space than you can afford and prove uninteresting. Starting from a point near the west side of the turnpike road, opposite Mr. Cooper's Store, and covering the Smedley purchase and the Court House, and extending nearly due west to the immediate neighborhood of the Northern Central Railway at Rider's Station, the land for a width of nearly one-half of a mile, belonged to the Gotts, who were intimately associated with the Lux's. — The property nearest the York Road, now held by Dr. Bosley and Mr. Matthews, belonged to Edward Gott, from whom Dr. Grafton Marsh, I believe, purchased it. Mr. Gott left two children: Maria, who married Rev. Mr. Lipscomb, long connected with the Colonization Society; and Richard, late Secretary and Treasurer of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. Next west of Edward was Richard Gott's property, now owned by Mr. Hartman, Mr. Boyce and others. Richard Gott left two sons and one daughter, Samuel Norwood, who spent most of his life in the West Indies, and died in Baltimore in 1848, childless; Thomas Jefferson, who was a well known Real Estate Broker in Baltimore, and died there in 1853, leaving two daughters; the daughter married Nicholas Merryman, of Hereford; she died in 1829, leaving an only child, the present John Merryman of Hayfields. Richard Gott was the intimate friend of Darby Lux the younger, and it is said they spent part of every day together. Upon each alternate day one of them had prepared a bowl of punch, and when ready it was announced by the discharge of an old flint musket, which brought the friends together. The musket was joint property and carried home upon the shoulder of the guest each day after they parted. West of Richard Gott's the property belonged to his cousin, of the same name, and is now known as the Woods' property, having been inherited by Richard Gott Woods from his uncle.

These recollections of early days are quite valuable and might never have been recorded had not J.M. been motivated by the paragraph on the destruction of the old house. Unfortunately, no further reminiscences from him (or her?) seem to have appeared in the newspaper.

Though the old house was torn down in 1872, it had been



— Sheppard Pratt Photo

Mt. Airy House, a freestanding 16-bed, residential program located on the campus of The Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, is licensed by the State of Maryland and is committed to meeting the needs of individuals with a chronic psychiatric illness. The house maintains a low stress and safe living environment where residents can learn more adaptive habits and skills in the areas of self-care, daily living, and community participation. It is a step between hospital and community placement.

photographed and a picture of it appeared in the Baltimore Sun in 1905 to illustrate a genealogical article about the Poultney family.

The name has not been forgotten. In the late 1960s, a school was established in the hospital so that the teenage patients could attend junior high school and high school classes. This school was accredited by the state and designated Mt. Airy Junior-Senior High School. Several rooms in the Chapman Building on the hospital grounds were remodelled to accommodate the school activities. In 1980 the school was merged with the Forbush Children's Center and the name was changed to the Forbush School.

Later, in September 1988, the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Health System opened a 16-bed "quarterway house" on the hospital grounds which was named Mt. Airy House. This is a facility for chronically mentally ill patients who no longer need hospital-level care. It looks like a modern suburban house and is located at the bottom of the hill where the old Mount Airy mansion once stood.

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