

A Brief History of the City of Bowie (1683 to Present)

The City of Bowie today encompasses a very large tract of land in northeastern Prince George's County that was once comprised of a vast number of colonial and early national period plantations and farms and early churches. The rich soil in this area had made it a prime location for production of both tobacco and crops. Principal among the plantations in the area was the Belair Mansion, built for colonial Governor Samuel Ogle around 1745, and encompassing some 2,500 acres. The house sat prominently atop a high hill and thus assumed a lofty view of the region for miles around.

The original Belair estate was patented in 1683 as a five hundred acre tract called Catton, owned by a Robert Carville of St. Mary's City. By 1719 the property had grown to 1,410 acres and was owned by the Reverend Mr. Jacob Henderson, Rector of Queen Anne's Parish. In 1721, Henderson formally changed the name from Catton to Belair. In March 1737, he sold his estate to Governor Samuel Ogle and Ogle's father-in-law, Benjamin Tasker, Sr. Though Ogle would soon buy out Tasker's interest, the Tasker family continued to play a major role in the eighteenth-century development of the plantation.

Samuel Ogle, three time colonial governor of Maryland, arrived in Annapolis in 1731 at the request of the proprietor, Charles Calvert, Fifth Lord Baltimore. 10 years later, Ogle married Anne Tasker, the daughter of one of the principal political and social leaders of colonial Maryland. While the Ogles left the next year for England, where they lived for four years, Benjamin Tasker, Sr., and his son, Benjamin, Jr., were left in charge of the construction for the large brick mansion house and the running of the estate.

The Mansion and grounds, complete with terraced gardens, a green house, vineyard, deer park and other outbuildings, was also famous for its stable. The estate has a long history as a world renowned stud farm associated with Thoroughbred race horses. Around 1747, Governor Ogle imported two Thoroughbreds from England, the stallion, Spark, and the filly, Queen Mab. Spark, bred by Lord Tankerville, had been a gift from Frederick, the Prince of Wales to Charles, Lord Baltimore, who in turn gave the horse to Ogle as a gift. The importation of these two horses marks the first attempt in this country to breed faster, stronger Thoroughbred race horses. Ogle's brother-in-law, Benjamin Tasker, Jr., likewise imported a superb mare, Selima, in 1750. She would quickly establish herself as the fastest horse on the turf in Maryland and Virginia.

Samuel Ogle's son, Benjamin Ogle I, served as Governor of the State of Maryland himself, being elected repeatedly for three one-year terms commencing in 1798. Other governors associated with the house include Benjamin Tasker, Sr., who, as President of the Council, served as the interim governor of the colony after the death of Governor Samuel Ogle in 1752, and for other brief periods, as well. Tasker's wife, Anne Bladen, was sister to Thomas Bladen, another colonial Governor. Tasker's great, great grandson was Lloyd Lowndes, governor of Maryland from 1896-1900. Lowndes' first name honored his maternal grandfather, Edward Lloyd V, another early Maryland governor. A near neighbor to the Belair Estate was Governor Oden Bowie, owner of "Fairview". All this contributes to the house's title as the "House of Governors".

In addition to the many historical figures associated with Belair is the City's Revolutionary War patriot,

Major Thomas Lancaster Lansdale. Lansdale joined the American forces in July, 1776. By December of 1776 he was made Captain in the Fourth Regiment, and was later promoted to Major in the Third Maryland Regiment in 1779. Having been taken a Prisoner of War twice during the Revolution, he served in the colonial forces until the peace was signed in 1783. Major Lansdale's grave records his life from 1748 to 1803. His remains rest in Major Thomas Lancaster Lansdale Park, on Collington Road (MD 197), opposite the Bowie Town Center.

Throughout the 18th and early 19th century, the Ogle family used Belair as a country estate. Their Annapolis townhouse, Ogle Hall, still stands, and serves as the U. S. Naval Academy Alumni House. Benjamin Ogle II sold the Annapolis house in 1815 and again made Belair his family's full-time residence. The Ogles remained at Belair through the next generation, but the financial havoc of the Civil War proved too much for the final owner, George Cooke Ogle, who was forced to sell the estate in 1871. The house passed through a number of hands for the remainder of the century, breaking that trend in 1898 when New York banker James T. Woodward, President of the Hanover Bank, purchased the estate.

The Woodward period marked a substantial revival for the Belair Estate. Woodward, from an old Southern Maryland family, enjoyed making additions to the property as well as to the Mansion itself. Around 1907 he added a new stable building, now restored as the Belair Stable Museum. Upon James' death, his nephew, William, inherited Belair. The Woodward family would later field some of the most important Thoroughbred race horses of the twentieth century under the colors of the Belair Stud Stable. Two Triple Crown winners were raised on the estate. Belair's Gallant Fox took the title in 1930. His son, Omaha, was the Triple Crown winner of 1935. They represent the only father/son horses to have ever captured the Triple Crown. Later, Belair's Nashua would be hailed as the "Horse of the Year" in 1955. The Woodwards, who lived permanently in New York, visited Belair often, a trip easily accomplished by the estate's proximity to the Pennsylvania Railroad Station in Bowie.

Adding to the richness of the area was the region's close proximity to Washington, D.C., and to Baltimore. With what would become Bowie sitting directly between the two great cities, a town naturally developed around the issue of transportation. Discussions as early as the 1850s had centered on creating a railroad into this part of the county, which would then extend down into Southern Maryland. One of the area's principal families, the Bowies, took a strong role in the creation of the railroads in Prince George's County.

In 1853, Col. William D. Bowie succeeded in convincing the Maryland Legislature to charter the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Company designed to serve Southern Maryland. Oden Bowie served as president of the company. A number of issues caused the effort to flounder initially, and the coming of the Civil War delayed all further plans.

In the aftermath of the War Between the States, the fledgling Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Company gained a powerful ally in the Pennsylvania Railroad, which was looking for a profitable route to establish into Washington, D.C. The U.S. Congress had denied the Pennsylvania Railroad direct access to the Nation's capital, already serviced by the Baltimore and Ohio. However, the Baltimore and Potomac

charter allowed for spur lines of up to twenty miles to be constructed. The alliance of the Pennsy with the B. and P. not only allowed the B. and P. to build its long-sought line into Southern Maryland, but also allowed the Pennsylvania Railroad to extend a spur to Washington. Train service was inaugurated on July 2, 1872. The "spur" line today serves as an integral part of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. The original mainline to Southern Maryland, which opened January 1, 1873, is still in use as well, and remains known as the Pope's Creek line.

The junction of the two lines formed a core around which the first real town of Bowie grew up. A developer, Ben Plumb, purchased three hundred acres at the site of the junction, and had it surveyed for town lots which sold for \$25.00 each. Available house plans ranged in size from four to eight rooms, with verandahs surrounding them. Shops, a hotel, railroad buildings, churches and houses began to spring up in the little settlement known as Huntington City. The rail depot itself was always known as the Bowie Station. The Maryland Legislature passed an Act of Incorporation for Huntington on March 3, 1874. The preeminence of the railroad station clearly had more impact, because by May 3, 1880, the Legislature passed another act to change the name of the town to Bowie, a tribute to Governor Oden Bowie whose influence had assisted in the formation of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad. Later, on April 18, 1916, Bowie would formally incorporate as the Town of Bowie.

A second railroad entered the community when the Baltimore, Washington and Annapolis electric trolley line began service in 1908. The large interurban cars brought rapid transit to the area, with trains that ran hourly, and half hourly, daily. Bowie area stations included High Bridge and Hillmeade. The W.B. & A. ceased to run in 1935, though the line between Baltimore and Annapolis operated until 1950.

Railroads always played a principal role in the Town of Bowie. In 1902, the Pennsylvania Railroad bought out the Baltimore and Potomac, and the name of the line changed at that time. A fire in 1910 destroyed the station buildings, but they were rebuilt in the years following that. The Pennsylvania Railroad electrified the line between Baltimore and Washington in 1935 as train travel modernized as well as sought ways to battle the ever encroaching influence of the automobile. In the early 1970s the Pennsylvania Railroad was acquired by the National Rail Passenger Service (Amtrak), which no longer made stops at the little Bowie Station. In 1989, the Maryland Rail Commuter Service (MARC) moved its local service up the line to a new station at Bowie State University, and the little station fell into disuse. The City of Bowie purchased the structures in 1991, moved the three buildings to their current site, and restored them. The Huntington Railroad Museum opened in 1994. It was joined, in 2006, by the restoration of the 1926 Bowie Building Association structure next door as the "Old Town Bowie Welcome Center and Children's Museum."

In 1908, the Maryland General Assembly established the Maryland Normal and Industrial School, incorporating the Baltimore Colored Normal School into the State Board of Education. Two years later, a farm called "Jericho," just outside of the Town of Bowie was purchased for the construction of the school. It opened in 1911 with four faculty members and sixty students. In 1938 the name changed to the State Teachers College of Bowie, later renamed as the Bowie State College. In 1988 the College became a part of the University of Maryland system as Bowie State University, offering a wide range of

degrees to undergraduate and graduate students.

Bowie is known to many as the site of the Bowie Race Track, founded in 1914 by the Southern Maryland Agricultural Association. The track saw continuous racing use until 1985, when racing activities ended. It continues to operate as a stable and training facility for horses.

The post World War II era brought the most significant changes to the Bowie region since the arrival of the railroad. In 1955, the William Woodward, Jr., owner of the Belair estate, died tragically at a family house on Long Island, New York. The Woodward family elected to sell Belair estate, which, by this time included the Mansion plus twenty-two additional dwellings for estate workers, twenty barns, a five acre pond and thirty wells. In the estate auctioning process, the horses went for over \$1.8 million, with over \$1.2 million having been paid for Nashua, the 1955 Horse of the Year. In August 1957, real estate developer William J. Levitt paid \$1,750,000 for the estate, and later that year in October, the contents of the house, including paintings, antique furnishings, china, silver and many other items, sold at auction for a total of some \$30,000.

Levitt established his offices at Belair Mansion and began the widespread construction of what constitutes the greatest portion of modern Bowie between 1957 and 1964. At the conclusion of that time, Levitt sold the Mansion to the City for one dollar with the stipulation that the building evermore be used for public purposes. In 1968, Levitt also conveyed the Belair Stable, which had been used as a construction storage area, to the City, which established the building as a museum. From 1964 till 1977 the Mansion served as Bowie City Hall, and even housed the local police station! The Stable was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, followed by the Mansion in 1977. The Mansion began a slow restoration in the early 1980s, which went into full swing in 1988. The restoration was completed in 1995, and the Mansion opened as a museum that year.

Today the City of Bowie has grown from the initial patchwork of farms and villages such as Collington, Mitchellville and Huntington into a vibrant city of more than 55,000 inhabitants in over eighteen square miles, containing some 20,600+ households. Numerous development projects are planned or are under construction in the Bowie area, including residential, retail and office parks. There is a diverse range of recreational facilities featuring fifty miles of bike trails, an indoor ice rink, tennis courts, seventy-eight athletic fields and sixteen parks. Bowie is also the home of the Radio and Television Museum, a cooperative venture between the Radio History Society and the City of Bowie Museums, and the Prince George's County Genealogical Society Library. In addition to its six museum sites, the City operates the Bowie Playhouse, and is the home of the Prince George's Stadium, home of the Bowie Baysox, a AA minor league affiliate of the Baltimore Orioles.