
TRACING THE SETTLEMENT OF HOWARD COUNTY, MARYLAND

OVERVIEW

The settlement of Howard County, Maryland began in earnest with the first land patent issued to Adam Shipley in 1687 for a tract of land called “Adam The First” located east of Rt. 108 just north of Snowden River Parkway. Most of the early land owners of Howard County already had property in what is today northern and central Anne Arundel County. I was curious where and when the various land patents were issued and to whom. My approach was two-fold:

1. Determine who were the early settlers of Howard County, which tracts did they acquire, where did they live, and what eventually happened to the tracts they acquired.
2. Determine which tracts of land were settled through the 18th century and by whom, determine the date order in which the land was settled, and present this information in a visually compelling way.

The two approaches are described in detail below.

IDENTIFYING THE EARLY SETTLERS OF HOWARD COUNTY

To identify the early settlers of Howard County, I created a public tree on Ancestry.com called “Prominent Families of Howard County, MD”. I initially pulled in trees others had created that looked well researched but soon realized most were not as accurate as I had hoped. Instead, I created the trees by perusing the usual sources which I have listed in Appendix A. The reason I chose Ancestry.com as my hosting service was that it is web-based, allows multiple contributors, and has numerous record collections for which matching records may be easily attached to appropriate events for each member of the tree. It also has many sources in its online library which I also include in Appendix A. Unfortunately, it has very limited reporting capability. I used two other tools for reporting: 1) a database management tool called The Master Genealogist, and 2) a website creation tool called Second Site.

I exported the Ancestry tree as a gedcom file into The Master Genealogist, which unfortunately is no longer supported but still works well enough as of this writing. Using the reporting options, I was able to perform some sanity checks on my data including:

1. Verify that all tree members had a gender specified (e.g. when importing records from Find A Grave the gender is set to “Unknown”).
2. Verify that all couples with children had a marriage event with at least a best guess for a marriage date so further reporting with the website builder tool would work.

3. Verify that all burial events were filled out properly particularly for the location information which is normalized so that all burials in the same cemetery can be shown together.
4. Verify that property events were normalized as to location.

This last check is very important since this was the main impetus for building out the tree in the first place. Property events were created for each settler and their heirs as property was acquired or changed hands. Since property was so often passed down to children, it was important to fill out the trees first so the property could be traced through the generations.

The Second Site tool works on databases created by The Master Genealogist to create customizable web sites that contain not only the usual lists of events for each tree member, but also some very well-formatted descendant and pedigree charts. I tend to prefer the condensed formats to the more spread out format used at Ancestry.com.

Much of the information I needed about the early settlers was found using the listed sources in Appendix A, but I found additional information through the second approach of tracing the land patents described next.

TRACING THE LAND PATENTS USING EXCEL

My initial source for the early land patents of Howard County was a list I found at <http://www.elkridgeheritage.org/collection/collection-research-index-to-land-patents/>. However, this list did not specify where the tracts were located and it was sometimes difficult to match the patents in this list with the information in the listed sources. Eventually, I found more useful land patent documentation provided at the Maryland State Archives site currently located at:

<http://guide.mdsa.net/pages/search.aspx?page=advsearch>

The documentation for each patent usually includes the survey (which is the most useful document for each patent since it provides the location and usually a drawing of each plat) as well as an historic cover sheet which gives the disposition of the patent application (i.e. whether the patent was issued or not). Sometimes additional petitions or declarations that show transfers of ownership or dispositions of estates or other disputes are also included. The surveys are what Dr. Caleb Dorsey used to create his well-known and much appreciated map of land grants which hangs in the Museum of Howard County History in Ellicott City, MD. However, he often included later resurveys of earlier patents (which are granted when land is combined with other tracts or vacancies), whereas I was interested in the earliest patent date for each tract of land. Since a fire in 1704 destroyed the land patents filed previously, the surveys for these land patents no longer exist. In fact, the earliest survey I found was for a patent issued in 1728 for a survey done in 1707. However, resurveys usually document the survey date, patentee, and acreage of the earlier patents that are being resurveyed. By extracting key information from each patent I was able to obtain a larger list of both original and updated patents with the corresponding survey and patent dates, patentee, owner if different from the patentee, surveyor, location as described by the surveyor, adjoining tracts or geographical landmarks, acreages, county where the patent was filed, and county where the tract is currently located. This list is located in the Excel workbook named HoCoHistoricPlacesPublish.xlsx on the second tab named LandGrants.

MAPPING THE LAND PATENTS USING GOOGLE EARTH

All of the survey data in my Excel list is interesting but does not provide the visual presentation I was looking for. I learned how to create placemarks, using color-coded flag icons corresponding to the major patent-holding families, in a folder within Google Earth to mark the approximate geographic center of each tract of land. I added a description from the Excel list which is automatically created in the Map Description column of each entry in the list by concatenating pertinent information from previous columns. While the Google Earth user interface does not support the entering of a datestamp before 1752, I was able to edit the saved XML data file (which has a .kml extension which stands for Keyhole Markup Language used for geographic data) to include a datestamp for each placemark. When this data file is opened in Google Earth, a timeline bar is displayed in the upper left corner of the map and the earliest placemark “Hockley” is displayed in eastern Howard County. (I generally select “Borders and Labels” and “Places” under the Layers | Primary Database menu to see the Howard County border and towns.) The timeline bar may be dragged forward in time to display the rest of the placemarks, or a button above the slider can be clicked that will display the placemarks automatically at the desired pace. In this way, I can graphically display how the northwestern expansion into present-day Howard County occurred.

There is a tab named PvtTbls in the Excel file that contains a pivot table showing the number of patents granted by surname. This is how I determined the top 16 patent-holding families in Howard County. It also shows the colors of the flags I assigned to them. Another pivot table shows the number of surveys performed for each surveyor.

HOW TO MAINTAIN GOOGLE EARTH PLACEMARKS

The dated land patent placemarks have been saved to a file named “Howard County Land Patents Dated By Survey.kml”. This file may be loaded into Google Earth by selecting “File | Open” and then selecting the data file. It will open as a folder under Temporary Places. Expand the “Howard County Land Patents Dated by Survey” folder to see all of the placemarks contained within. The land patents will be displayed in alphabetic order as they were entered in the file. You may navigate to a placemark by typing part of the name into the search bar immediately below the folder. This is a great way to find the smaller tracts. To save the folder to “My Places” where it will be loaded each time Google Earth is launched, right-click on the folder and select “Save to My Places” from the pop-up menu. This folder will be saved to the cloud and will always be available whenever you launch Google Earth.

Similarly, the file “Howard County Land Patents Dated By Survey NoLbl.kml” may also be opened in Google Earth and saved to “My Places”. The file contains the same information but the flag labels are disabled unless hovered over. This allows a clearer picture of the automatic display using the timeline bar.

If changes are needed to the placemarks, edit the data file with Notepad++ or some other text-based editor (not a word processor). If you are familiar with XML, you can easily determine the tags that are used to define each placemark. You can search for the placemark you want to change and edit the description, begin date, or flag icon.

To move an existing placemark, right-click on the icon with the Google Earth app and select Properties from the pop-up menu. The Properties screen will display and the flag-icon will flash (you may need to move the Properties screen out of the way to see the flag icon). Drag the flag icon to the appropriate location and select OK on the Properties screen. Then save the folder to a different name (don't overwrite the data file since the saved file will be in a slightly different and undesirable format). Open the new file in a text editor and search for the placemark. Then copy the location coordinates back to the placemark in the original data file.

To determine the location of a new placemark, right-click on the placemark folder and select Add | Placemark. Enter the name and description in the Properties screen and select OK. Save the folder to a new file as described above. Copy a similar placemark description from the original .kml to the appropriate (alphabetically-sorted) location. Copy the name, description, and coordinates from the newly-saved data file as described previously. Be sure to edit the date appropriately.

Backups of the .kml data files are strongly advised.

TRACING THE HISTORIC SITES

To trace the historic sites, I imported the list of their names and locations into the same Excel workbook on the first tab named MHT-HoCo from the Maryland Historical Trust Inventory of Historic Properties website (<https://mht.maryland.gov/mihp/MIHP.aspx?Search=County&County=Howard>). I added additional columns to capture information such as a brief description of the property, the original and last known owners, links to the MHT documentation, wikipedia, the National Register, and any other useful sites or articles. The Map Desc column contains a description that concatenates previous columns and may be copied to the placemark descriptions in Google Earth. The placemarks are contained in the data file "Howard County Historic Sites Dated.kml" and can be maintained as described above for the land patents. While I have 140 sites documented in the workbook only a much smaller number have been mapped.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Land patent surveys often contain references to nearby waterways with names that do not appear to be documented anywhere else that I could find. I created an additional sheet in the Excel file called PlaceNames with a table of the branches and their locations. I also mapped these waterways in Google Earth and saved the placemarks in the data file "Howard County Waterways.kml". This file I have maintained strictly through the user interface so the data file is a bit messier. There is no rhyme or reason to the color coding; I just tried to use different colors to distinguish between them.

I also maintained a placemark folder of cemeteries via the user interface and saved it to the data file "Howard County Area Cemeteries.kml". Only a small number have been mapped at this point. There are two smaller data files for the land patents and historic sites of Anne Arundel County as well. I intend to work on mapping that county out next so only a small number of patents and sites are included.

MAPPING PLATS IN GOOGLE EARTH

There are several areas of the Dorsey Land Grant map that were left blank or where plats had been left unlabeled. I used a free web-based mapping application called PlatPlotter (<http://platplotter.blogspot.com/>) to create a plat for each land patent that seemed to be located in those areas that could be opened in Google Earth as described above. Once I saw how useful it was I ended up mapping the entire county. The resulting data file is called "Howard County Land Plats Dated.kml". The plats are dated according to their survey date if known; otherwise, the patent date is used. Since the surveys are rendered using "metes and bounds", which means measuring the direction and distance between designated boundary markers, elevation changes are not taken into account. Since Howard County is a rather hilly area, many of the plats appear larger on a 2-dimensional map than they should. Imagine walking north 50 perches uphill and then downhill in the same direction and distance. The survey would record "north 100 perches" but the footprint on a map could be considerably less depending on how steep the hill was. Therefore, the plats often overlap, especially the larger ones since the larger the plat the larger the distortion. While some surveys cite geographical features that are still extant, including those located on waterways, most of the plats are located using a best fit method and by no means should these plats be used in any serious way as a means of locating the boundaries of these tracts. If you right-click on a plat in the Google Earth folder and select "Properties" you will be positioned over the plat and the property description will show the color of the plat which should help you distinguish the plat.

Many of the tracts were divided and resurveyed multiple times so overlapping and intersecting lines do appear. Tracts that are completely resurveyed are given an end date that is the same as the begin date of the resurvey. In this way, older plats can disappear when the newer resurvey plat appears. This is controlled by the timeline bar which is demonstrated in this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jt40eoevCVc>.

You may view specific plats by commenting out the plats you don't want to see using a text editor on the data file. This site describes how: https://www.w3schools.com/html/html_comments.asp.

APPENDIX A

Here is a list of the sources I found most helpful in compiling this information.

Sources used via Ancestry.com:

Badger, Matilda P.. *Genealogy of the Linthicum and allied families*. Baltimore, Md.: unknown, 1936?.

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Evans, Charles W.. *Biographical and historical accounts of the Fox, Ellicott, and Evans families, and the different families connected with them*. Buffalo: Press of Baker, Jones & Co., 1882.

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Riggs, John Beverley, *The Riggs family of Maryland : a genealogical and historical record, including a study of the several families in England*. Baltimore, Md.: Lord Baltimore Press, 1939.

Shirk, Ida Morrison Murphy,. *Descendants of Richard and Elizabeth (Ewen) Talbott : of Poplar Knowle, West River, Anne Arundel County, Maryland*. Baltimore: Day Print. Co., 1927.

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Thomas, Lawrence Buckley,. *The Thomas book giving the genealogies of Sir Rhys ap Thomas, K.G., the Thomas family descended from him, and of some allied families*. New York: Henry T. Thomas Co., 1896.

Warfield, J. D.. *The founders of Anne Arundel and Howard Counties, Maryland : a genealogical and biographical review from wills, deeds and church records*. Baltimore, Md.: Kohn & Pollock, 1905.

Warfield, Joshua Dorsey.. *The Warfields of Maryland*. Baltimore: Daily Record Co., 1898.

Welsh, Luther W.. *Ancestral colonial families : genealogy of the Welsh and Hyatt families of Maryland and their kin : giving the colonial generations of the Howard, Hammond, Maccubbin, Griffith, Greenberry, Dorsey, Van Sweringen, Baldwin, Gaither, Warfield and Duvall families*. Independence, Mo.: Lambert Moon Print. Co., 1928.

Other Sources on the Internet:

Newman, Henry Wright, *Anne Arundel Gentry* (n.p.: self-published, unknown publish date). Found at ExLibris Rosetta but has since been restricted:

https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE2061982

Wise, Margaret Wise, *Images of America Ellicott City*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006.

Maryland Historical Trust Inventory of Historic Properties: <http://mdihp.net/>

Rediscovering the North Tract: <http://rediscoveringthenorthtract.yolasite.com/snowden-cemetery.php>

Snowden-Warfield website: <http://snowden-warfield.com/AncestralHomes.htm>

Maryland State Archives: <http://guide.mdsa.net/pages/search.aspx?page=advsearch>

Books:

Barnes, Robert, *Colonial Families of Anne Arundel County, Maryland*. Millsboro, DE: Colonial Roots, 2015.

Hopkins, Frank Snowden, *My Hopkins and Snowden Ancestors*. 1976.

Hopkins, G. M., *Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Baltimore Including Howard Co, Maryland*. Ellicott City, MD: Howard County Bicentennial Commission, Inc., 1975.

Hurley, William M., Jr., *The Mullinix Families*. 2005.

Stein, Charles Frances, Jr., *Origins and History of Howard County, Maryland*. Baltimore, MD: self-published, 1972.