The Baker Family of Aberdeen, Maryland

John H Livezey
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Aberdeen

1878 Simon J. Martenet
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ABERDEEN — AN EARLY DEVELOPER’S PET PROJECT

by Jon Harlan Livezey

Aberdeen is said to have been so named by a Mr. Winston, agent for the Philadelphia, Wilmington, & Baltimore Railroad at its stop near Hall’s Cross Roads. The railroad was established in the 1830’s, but exactly when Mr. Winston, supposedly a native of Aberdeen, Scotland, christened the place, is unknown. The name certainly had stuck by the 1850’s, when a “Plat of the Village of Aberdeen, Harford County, Maryland” was drawn under the direction, if not in the hand, of Edmund Law Rogers (1813-1896). Mr. Rogers was one of the Baltimore business men who in 1853 purchased part of the Hall’s Park tract from the Hall family and began selling town lots. The plat states that Aberdeen was “Founded A.D. 1852 and laid out by Edmund Law Rogers.”

Mr. Rogers was a member of a prominent Baltimore family, whose estate “Druid Hill” became the site of the park of the same name. He was a wealthy dilettante and a man of many interests. He was an art collector, a linguist, a science buff, and a horse racing enthusiast, and was interested in music and literature. He was considered a brilliant conversationalist and a “gentleman of the old school.” Among his accomplishments was the design of the Pimlico Race Track, in which he had a financial interest. Rogers Avenue, the important thoroughfare which runs past the track, was named in his honor.

In the case of Aberdeen, Mr. Rogers did not wait for someone to bestow the honor on him. Three principal parallel streets were designated by him as Edmund, Law, and Rogers. His wife, Charlotte Matilda Leeds Plater, a granddaughter of Governor George Plater of Maryland, is remembered in Plater Street. The present Franklin Street was originally Charlotte. The Druid Hill Rogers family were kin to members of the Buchanan family and the alley behind West Bel Air Avenue has that name. Mrs. Rogers’ mother was an Edmondson and Mr. Rogers’ father was named Lloyd; those names appear as alleys. Jones and Harriet Alleys also may refer to Rogers kin. Mr. Rogers’ mother, Eliza Law, was the daughter of Eliza Parke Custis, in turn the daughter of John Parke Custis, Martha (Dandridge) Washington’s son, and of his wife, Eleanor Calvert, granddaughter of the

2 Copy of plat furnished by John M. Itivins.
4 See article on Edmund Law Rogers by James C. Bertram, Sunday Sun Magazine, April 12, 1953. (Clipping in Dielman-Hayward File, Maryland Historical Society).
sixth Lord Baltimore. Calvert and Dandridge Streets, bordering Washington Square, never materialized, but Parke and Custis are principal streets today.

As in the case of many town concepts, the actual development did not carry out all the planner's proposals. Not only did Washington Square - apparently to be the choice residential area, with an Episcopal church site at one end - fail to come about, but neither did a large cemetery on the site of the old school playground, probably meant to incorporate or enlarge the existing Methodist Episcopal churchyard. Despite the fact that several of the amenities never came to be, most of Mr. Rogers' plans and the names he wished to memorialize are part of the everyday lives of thousands of local citizens one hundred and thirty years after he put them on paper.

Genealogy Notes

THE BAKER FAMILY OF ABERDEEN

by Jon Harlan Livezey

The Bakers of Aberdeen, descendants of a colonial era Nicholas Baker, were perhaps the most prominent family in that community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were leaders in the canning industry, in government, the Methodist Episcopal Church, farming, banking, and real estate. They built imposing Victorian residences in Aberdeen and established the local cemetery which bears the family name and contains a number of large monuments to mark their own final resting places. The purposes of this article, a summary of more extensive genealogical data collected by the compiler, is to provide a sketch identifying the members of the first seven generations of the family and their relationships, as well as noting a few relevant facts about the most notable among them.

Harford County and colonial Baltimore County records contain the names of numerous individuals bearing the surname Baker, most of whom lived in the Little Gunpowder Falls area. No proof of relationship of the Nicholas Baker family with other Bakers outside of the Carsins Run-Aberdeen area has yet been unearthed. It has been learned that Henry Baker, of a prominent Cecil County family, owned land in the same vicinity as the "Aberdeen Bakers."

First and Second Generations

NICHOLAS [I] in 1737 was apparently living in that part of Spesutia Upper Hundred which became Susquehanna Hundred. In 1768, he was described as a planter when he leased the 125 acre tract of "Hall's Plains," where he was living, from William Horton for ten years. He died sometime before May 1774, when his estate was opened. His first wife, Martha Wood (b. 1724), daughter of Joshua
and Mary Wood, bore him at least seven children: Providence (b. 1743; Mrs. John Plogue); Nicholas [II], q.v.; Benjamin (b. 1750); Martha (b. 1754); John Wood (b. 1756); George (b. 1759); and Joshua (b. 1761). Martha, John, and George did not share in their father’s estate when it was finally distributed in 1804. Nicholas’ second wife appears to have been Mary Gilbert (b. 1747), daughter of Charles and Elizabeth (Hawkins) Gilbert. She bore him two children - Mary (b. 1765; Mrs. Samuel Anderson), and Susannah (b. 1768). After Nicholas’ death, Mary married James Horner.

Second and Third Generations

NICHOLAS [II] (1748-1780) in 1776 was living in Susquehanna Hundred with his wife Agnes (b. ca. 1752) and his brother Joshua, probably on the 100 acres of “Mitchell’s Lot” which he contracted to purchase in 1774. Nicholas and Agnes, later the wife of John Bonar, apparently had three children born in the late 1770’s: Mary (Mrs. Mordecai Meads); Nicholas [III], q.v.; and Martha (Mrs. James Presbury). In 1784, his heirs received a deed for 50 acres of “Durbin’s Beginning,” which he had contracted to purchase in 1779.

Third and Fourth Generations

NICHOLAS [III] (ca. 1778-1845), a farmer and country merchant, married Elizabeth Cole (ca. 1778-ca. 1861), presumably the daughter of James and Sophia (Hanson) Cole. They had eight children who grew to adulthood in the Carsins Run area at the intersection of Churchville Road with Aldino-Stepney Road, sometimes known as “Baker’s” or “Baker’s Corner”: Sophia (b. ca. 1802; Mrs. Taylor Gilbert); Elizabeth (b. ca. 1807; Mrs. Henry Fielden Arnold); Nicholas [IV], q.v.; Sarah (b. ca. 1813; single); George Washington, q.v.; James C. (b. ca. 1817; single, committed to an asylum in his late 30’s); Charles G., q.v.; and John Hanson [I], q.v.

Fourth and Fifth Generations

NICHOLAS [IV] (1810-1896) married twice. By Elizabeth Carsins (1819-1853), he was the father of: Elizabeth Ann (b. 1839; Mrs. George Thomas Everist); John Carsins, q.v.; Charles Henry, q.v.; Mary Jane (b. 1845; Mrs. Frank F. Bruce); Sarah Frances (b. 1848; Mrs. Martin L. Gilbert); and George Hildt, q.v. Nicholas’ second wife, Mary B. Greenland (1819-1903), was the mother of Edmund Monroe (1859-1871) and Winfield Lee, q.v.

GEORGE WASHINGTON (1815-1888) is credited with being the founder of the corn canning industry in Harford County, the source of prosperity for his branch of the family. He first was a cabinet maker and was in the ship timber business, but in the 1860’s began the canning of fruit and later, of corn. He bought 14 acres, apparently the homesite, of his father’s land, “Mitchell’s Lot” at Carsins Run, from his brothers and sisters in 1849. After his financial successes, he built a large house (later the residence of his daughter, Mrs. Courtney, and which is still standing) on another part of the property on the opposite side of Churchville Road next to the land upon which Baker’s Cemetery was established. He and his wife, Elizabeth Greenland (1818-1893), a sister of his
brother Nicholas' wife, had fifteen children, of whom nine lived to maturity: Sarah Rebecca (b. 1839; Mrs. John E. Carby); William Benjamin, q.v.; Lydia C. (b. ca. 1844; Mrs. C. Wesley Harward); James Bramwell, q.v.; Charles Winfield, q.v.; John Hanson [II], q.v.; Susan Eliza Hutton (b. 1852; Mrs. Claypoole R. Courtney); Alice Cordelia (b. 1854; Mrs. Asel Tollenger); and George Allen (1856-1909). The last named was a prosperous canner who left no issue. He married Martha W. Sumption (later Mrs. Morris Thomas), and built a large mansion in her home town of Havre de Grace, which was later to become the Havre de Grace Hospital.

CHARLES G. (1821-1905) a carpenter, married Adeline Osborn (b. ca. 1822) and Lydia Stricklen. He had two children by the first marriage: Emily E. (b. ca. 1849) and Nicholas Harvey, q.v.

JOHN HANSON [I] (1823-1894) was a local Methodist preacher, who served in the Maryland House of Delegates. By his first wife, Sarah Rebecca Ruff, he had two sons, Wilfred R. (b. ca. 1852) and Summerfield Vinton (1859-1924), neither of whom remained in Harford County. His second wife, Cornelia E. Stockham (1833-1916), was the mother of Mary (b. 1870; d. young) and Dr. Thomas Stockham (1871-1939), scholar of German, director of the Jacob Tome Institute, and president of Carnegie Institute of Technology.

Fifth and Sixth Generations

JOHN CARSINS (1841-1927), a canner, married Martha Louise Chapman Wells (1849-1918) and had: Harry R. (1868-1870); Edgar Nicholas, q.v.; Howard Wells, baseball player and engineer; Walter C. (b. ca. 1873), railroad man in Philadelphia; Clarence B. (1874-1876), and Florence Olivia (Mrs. Daniel Hope).

CHARLES HENRY (1843-1875) married Martha Frances Mills and they were the parents of Oliver H. and Mary A. (Mrs. Browning).

GEORGE HILDT (1850-1880) married Mary Elizabeth Wells (1857-1939), whose second husband was Charles Osborn. The Bakers had a daughter, Georgie H. (1880-1906).

WINFIELD LEE (1861-1922), farmer, married his cousin, Elizabeth D. Williams (1868-1944) and had Mary Elizabeth (Mrs. Harvey Miller Scarborough) and Winfield Lee, Jr. (1905-1979).

WILLIAM BENJAMIN (1840-1911), canner, broker, first president of the First National Bank of Aberdeen, Delegate, State Senator, and Member of Congress, was the most influential of the Bakers on the growth of the Town of Aberdeen. He built one of the three imposing Baker mansions on West Bel Air Avenue. He and his first wife, Mary Olivia Wells (1843-1869), had a son Albion Wilmer (1868-1869). His second wife, Mary Catharine Hollis (1847-1922), bore him: Ada Olivia (1874-1877); Jessie May (b. 1878; Mrs. Thomas Arthur Cronin); Hollis Roswell, q.v.; and Nettie Florence (b. 1883; Mrs. Phineas Morris).

JAMES BRAMWELL (1845-1912) was a successful canner and farmer like his older brother and built a large house next to his. As a young man, he was a
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James Bramwell (1845-1912) was a successful canner and farmer like his older brother and built a large house next to his. As a young man, he was a
butcher for several years at Shelbyville, Shelby County, Kentucky, in business with his brother Charles. James married Frances Matilda Richardson (1846-1920) of Shelby County and they had four children: Bertha Hastings (b. 1881; Mrs. James Scott Middelton); Mabel Elizabeth (1882-1884); George Harold, q.v.; and Maud Richardson (b. 1887; Mrs. Charles Albert Goodyear). Mr. Baker was one of the first Town Commissioners of Aberdeen (1892-1896).

CHARLES WINFIELD (1848-1918), who started his career in the meat business in Aberdeen and in Shelbyville, Kentucky, was perhaps the most financially successful of the Bakers, with canning and canned goods brokerage as the fountainhead of his wealth. His residence at the corner of Paradise Road and Bel Air Avenue is the most ornate of the three large Baker mansions. He married Emma Franklin Michael (1850-1907), who was a church organist, and they had four children: Pendleton Tevis, q.v.; Frank Emerson, q.v.; Beulah (b. 1886; Mrs. John Victor Adams); and Austin Lynn, q.v. Mr. Baker's second wife was Susan Ordella Pritchard (1866-1931). He was an Aberdeen Town Commissioner from 1892 to 1894, serving with his brother James, and was a member of the Harford County Board of Education.

JOHN HANSON [II] (1849-1930) was also a canner, but on a more modest scale than his brothers. Like his uncle for whom he was named, he was a local M.E. preacher. By his first wife, Elizabeth Jane Smith (1853-1892), he had four children: Viola Estelle (b. 1873; Mrs. Granville Putman Pyle); Margaret Littleton (b. 1876; Mrs. William Jarrett Baldwin); Warren LeRoy, q.v.; and William Reid (1886-1887). Mr. Baker married Mrs. Katherine (Miller) Kimmell (1848-1924), widow of Solomon Kimmell, as his second wife.

NICHOLAS HARVEY (1851-1926), a painter, was twice married. By his first wife, Henrietta Jones (1858-1896), he was the father of Mary Adeline (b. 1876; m. John Winfield Bennett Scott Greenland and James H. Mouldsdale); Charles Harvey, q.v.; Elsie (m. Ralph Elliott and Ambrose Ewing); Addie H. (1884-1900); Emma (b. 1880; m. Jacob F. Sargable and Howard Hipkins); Ernest Franklin, q.v.; Millard Reed (1888-1945; single); and Henry Mitchell, q.v. Mr. Baker's second wife, Frances C. (Keithley) Coale (1860-1919), widow of Christmas Day Coale, was the mother of Oliver D. (b. 1898) and Nettie C. (b. ca. 1904; m. Harry H. Hartman and Madison E. Oals). Oliver married Cora E. Cresmer (b. ca. 1901) and removed to Pennsylvania where they had three children before their divorce.

Sixth and Seventh Generations

EDGAR NICHOLAS (1871-1964), canner and building engineer, married Emma Irene Foster (1872-1957) and they had two sons, Nelson Collins and Foster Nicholas.

HOLLIS ROSWELL (1880-1925), like his father, was President of the First National Bank of Aberdeen (1919-1925). He married Mabel Estelle Charles (1885-1940) - who as a widow married George Walter Smith - and had two children: Pauline Estelle, who married Malcolm Yarnall Tarring and Samuel
Creighton Lytle; and William Benjamin, II (1915-1934), who was accidentally killed while carrying a shotgun.

GEORGE HAROLD (1884-1957) was employed at the Aberdeen Proving Ground; he lived in the house built by his father, was an amateur historian, and a graduate and trustee of Dickinson College. He had three sons by his wife, Louise Lockhart: George Harold, A.P.G. employee; James Lockhart of Anne Arundel County, and Richard Barry, medical text illustrator.

PENDLETON TEVIS (1875-1943), canned goods broker in the firm of C.W. Baker & Sons, served as president of the Board of Education of Harford County. He married Ethel Lee Ridgely (1882-1961) and had four children: Helen Lee (Mrs. Peter Kenrick Kelly); Emma Franklin (Mrs. Kai Eduard Rasmussen); Tevis Ridgely (1911-1980), Aberdeen Realtor and tennis enthusiast; and Charles Winfield, [III], teacher and band leader.

FRANK EMERSON (1877-1957), canned goods broker, lived in the C. W. Baker house and was President of the Aberdeen Town Commissioners ("Mayor") from 1916 to 1950, having served as a member of the board for six years before 1916. He married Edith Clare Kimmell (1884-1907) and had a son, Charles Emerson. By his second wife, Edythe A. Rogers (1893-1981), long time librarian at Aberdeen, he had two daughters: Frances Adele (Mrs. Harry Addison Bechtol) and Margaret Grace (Mrs. John Richardson Liles).

AUSTIN LYNN (1893-1965) built a fine brick residence across from his father's home, but lived his later years in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania. He and his wife, Marian Reba Charshee, had one daughter: Marian Lynn, wife of A. Bruce MacDonald and Christian Peter Smith.

WARREN LEROY (1878-1954) m. Mary Albaugh and had one daughter, Elizabeth (Mrs. Joseph Reynolds).

CHARLES HARVEY (ca. 1879-1956), a local painter, m. Mary Anna Coale (1885-1949) and had six children: Florence Belle (1902-1909); Birchel Paul, Pauline A. (1911-1912); Isabel (Mrs. Nathan Whitfield Moore, Jr.); Kenneth C.; and Marvin Kriete. Mr. and Mrs. Baker were divorced after which she married Emmett Bishop.

ERNEST FRANKLIN (ca. 1889-1965), painter for the U.S. government, married Lillie Mae Boyd and had sons Harvey and Charles B. and a daughter, Bernice.

HENRY MITCHELL (1893-1949) m. Rhoda Victoria Keithley (1899-1972) and had a son Harry Vernon (1926-1957) and a daughter Irene May (Mrs. Shelton).

[Citations to sources for the above material have not been included because of space limitations. They are available from the compiler.]
JAMES B. BAKER HOUSE

WILLIAM B. BAKER HOUSE
West Bel Air Avenue in Aberdeen retains a valuable collection of late nineteenth century houses recalling a period of great prosperity brought by the canning industry. Once there were more of these houses than today and they and their landscaped grounds were better maintained. In spite of drastic changes wrought in the fabric of America’s towns in the twentieth century this district in Aberdeen retains much of its historic fabric and — west of the B&O Railroad — it is not interrupted by modern commercial intrusions.

The first and most important Aberdeen name in this period of canning prosperity is Baker. Many of the oldest houses on this street were built by Bakers and three of the oldest are the subjects of these Architectural Notes. The ancestral Baker House was west of town, now the residence of Dr. and Mrs. Peter Rodman. That land was first bought by a Baker — Nicholas II — in 1774. His grandson, George W. Baker, the first canner, built a house just east of Baker’s Cemetery and George W.’s sons William B., James B., and Charles W., built the houses discussed here. Another son, John H., built a house nearby, now much simplified. Yet another son, George A., built a house in Havre de Grace which became the original Havre de Grace Hospital and George W.’s daughter, Lydia, married C.W. Harward who built the house demolished for Campus Hills Shopping Center. All of these houses are and were of the same period, type and scale.

The lots for the Charles W., James B. and William B. Baker houses were purchased in 1893 from the Aberdeen Land & Improvement Company and all three houses were built soon thereafter. The same general descriptive terms apply to the three houses: of frame construction covered with weatherboards and shaped wooden shingles combined for a deliberate architectural effect; large; sophisticated; impressive; totally asymmetrical in design, yet balanced; deliberately designed to be picturesque; on large lots with a designed landscape providing a proper setting.

Architecturally the Charles W. Baker house seems slightly earlier than the others, being of a style dating from the late 1880s. Prominently situated at the

1 Liber JLG F fol. 445, Harford County Land Records
2 Liber WSF 75 fol. 424, HCLR
northwest corner of West Bel Air Avenue and Paradise Road, its principal facade facing the latter, it retains substantial portions of a wrought-iron fence with granite posts. C.W.B.'s initials embellish each of the gates. The fence is a frame around a setting for an important house, the total effect sought by wealthy gentlemen for their residences. Although other elements of this total landscape design have been lost to functional parking for the house's recent usage as apartments — specimen and ornamental plants, shaped flower beds, curving carriage drives and walks — much of the fence remains, a priceless ornament which more than anything else here preserves the effect of past grandeur. Two original ornamental outbuildings stand behind the house; the barn, now converted into apartments, is across Paradise Road.

The present owners are preserving original concepts and elements and their goal is a careful restoration of the premises with damaging effects of the apartment subdivision eliminated. Much of the original fabric remains throughout. Externally the shutters, the wood shingle roof and some stained glass are the principal losses but the wealth of remaining original details far outweighs these losses: the porches with all their detailing; wood siding and shingles; the sashes with ornamental glazing patterns; the dormers; the roof cresting; and the massive chimneys with bold corbeling, to mention a few.
The James B. and William B. Baker houses, standing side-by-side on the south side of West Bel Air Avenue, east of Baltimore Street, clearly belong to the 1890s. Both retain their large lots with ornamental specimen plantings and both houses retain most of their original detailing. Both retain much of their wood-shingled roofs which preserves their historic appearance and neither has been covered with aluminum siding which can reduce exterior detailing to blandness. The James Baker house even retains many of its original wooden shutters, those fragile former necessities so vulnerable to loss due to the high cost of maintenance. Careful paint preparation at the William Baker House is revealing some original green color on the wall shingles, recalling an era when white was not the stylish color and each different surface material and element could be picked out in a contrasting color.

All three houses have facades of three bays plus a major vertical design element on the right front corner and left side. Two have small second story porches facing the street over the major porch (the James Baker house has lost its railing here, and a roof has been added over the small upper porch of the William Baker house) and the Charles W. Baker house has a projecting bay here. All three houses have porches across the front bays, wrapping around the left side. The James Baker and Charles Baker houses have dormers as major additional elements for the third story in the front while the William Baker house has a gable. Chimneys pierce the roofs at similar points in each house. Thus the three houses are seen to be surprisingly similar in concept yet totally different in detail. Raising the cornice above the third floor line at the Charles Baker house especially disguises the similarities which this house shares with the other two.

IRON FENCE DETAIL

J.T.W.
Combining the historic motifs of several past styles is characteristic of late nineteenth century architecture. The picturesque asymmetry originated in the medieval period and the massively simple hipped roofs and dormers of the James Baker house belong to the Romanesque-revival which recalls the architecture of the early medieval period in southern France. The more intricate detailing of the Charles Baker house recalls the late Gothic architecture of France. At the William Baker house the octagonal turret with its steep conical roof recalls a late medieval French period but the "Venetian" or "Palladian" window in the upper gable and the modillion cornice (even on the medieval turret) predict the American Colonial-revival which would become nationally stylish in the next century.

Three of the next generation of Baker houses are in the American Colonial-revival tradition. The P. Tevis Baker house (now Baker & Baker Real Estate) and the Beulah Baker Adams house (now the residence of George B. Adams, Jr.) are freer examples of the developing Colonial revival and the brick Lynn Baker house (now owned by Robert L. Tarring) is a more authentic interpretation.

The author is indebted to Jon Harlan Livezey and Anne C. Rodman for assistance in understanding the historical and genealogical backgrounds of these houses.

Seal of ABERDEEN

In the early nineteen-twenties, Aberdeen was noted for its agriculture and the Aberdeen Proving Ground. The Seal pays tribute to these vital needs of the area by a ribbon showing "Agriculture and Armaments."

Above the Shield is a double cannon denoting our association with the Aberdeen Proving Ground.

The Shield itself shows an ear of corn with a crown denoting the major crop of the area. The tracks indicate that most of the shipping at that time was done by railroad.

The "Thistle" in the Shield indicates our close tie with Aberdeen Scotland, for which, Aberdeen, Maryland was named.
The Dead Speak

by Betty Grabarek *

Where is the house whose tenants lie
in grassy plot, squared off by fence,
preserved by Bicentennial Committee?
The time-worn stones bear names important
in the County's early history;
The M.D. of a patriarch’s name
suggests a healer riding horseback
to the people of its scattered farms.

Cousins, servants lie together
as it was in older times;
and newborn nameless infants. . .
The doctor could not save his own.
The house is gone, the land no longer
farmed, and horses graze in barren fields.

* Ms. Grabarek’s work has won regional and national poetry awards. She lives in Aberdeen and is currently president of the Harford Poetry Society. The ‘grassy plot’ she writes about is the old Dallam family graveyard near APG’s Short Lane gate.

“The Dead Speak” is printed with permission, all rights retained by Betty Grabarek.
AN OLD BUSINESS

by Mary Bristow

(For Aberdeen’s history, readers are referred to Aberdeen Diamond Jubilee Historical Booklet by H. Kenneth Livezey and Jon Harlan Livezey, 1967; History of Aberdeen Maryland by Richard F. Cronin, 1976; Our Harford Heritage by C. Milton Wright, 1967 and 1980.)

Aberdeen’s essential blessings are: its location along the north-south trade and post road in fertile farm land and near abundant waters; the advent of railroads in 1835 and 1883; lusty canning and canned goods brokerage firms; settlement of Aberdeen Proving Ground in World War I; energetic people; numerous commercial enterprises.

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Courtesy of Robert L. Tarrying
Tarring's Funeral Home has long been part of the town's living and dying. Henry Tarring (1853-1927) a Port Deposit native, came to Aberdeen while working for the B&O railroad. He went into business with his father-in-law, John Greenland—listed as a miller in an 1880 directory—later setting out by himself dealing in farm and canning house equipment, hardware, furniture and related retail trade.

At some time, Henry joined John C. Fletcher in the funeral business (est. 1854?) which later become known as Fletcher & Tarring and next simply Henry Tarring and later still Henry Tarring & Sons. With energy apparently to spare, Henry also worked for the canned goods brokerage house of C.W. Baker and William Morgan.

Henry’s son John Greenland Tarring (1889-1970) gradually assumed duties as funeral director; it was he who built the present handsome brick structure at 333 South Parke street. John continued working through the years; his brothers LeRoy and Oscar ran the mercantile end of family enterprises. The store stood on the southeast corner of Bel Air avenue and Parke street, behind which, in a garage, bodies were prepared for burial.

Tarrings and the town prospered. A sportsmen’s lodge and club house on Spesutie island is remembered by old timers. Wealthy members often shopped in town. Fabulous J.P. Morgan would arrive for supplies and general browsing. He always visited Tarring’s store; “a rousing old hardware store” he called it. He loved the place; just the smells intoxicated and he would fondle tools and gadgets as though they were fine gems.

As World War I ravaged, APG’s needs strained the town’s facilities as well as swelling merchants’ coffers. Boom time among war-time horrors. Then more misery. The influenza pandemic of 1918-19. Citizens and soldiers were felled. Tarring Funeral Home could not keep up with service demands. The ground was frozen. Citizens were appalled by the number of coffins stacked up outside the place. Fifty people dead from APG alone, with another 800 or so in the Post hospital. With 1000 more troops — some already reported ill — expected, army and civil authorities set bans and curfews in attempt to break the infectious chain. People prayed. By the end of October, the plague had peaked and living returned more to normal. On the Post, 1500 had been afflicted and seventy had died.

Besides war and pestilence, Aberdeen had earlier suffered a devastating fire in the central commercial district. A dynamite blast deliberately set off in Tarring’s store halted spread of the damage. A new store was built and business went on under Tarring ownership until 1955 when it was sold to Max Effron.

1 Birth and death dates supplied by Jon Harlan Livezey and Robert Lee Tarring
2 Livezey: Diamond Jubilee, p. 109
3 Cronin: History of Aberdeen p. 51
4 Most narrative information from Robert Lee Tarring; personal interview March 1983
5 The AEgis October 1918; Rapid Fire enlisted men’s newspaper APG 10/31/18
Robert Lee Tarring, present funeral director, cannot recall World War I events first hand; he was born after the war. Yet he can tell stories with relish as they were relayed by his father, Oscar Rudell Tarring (1891-1968). Bob Tarring—one soon calls him Bob—does remember two horse-drawn hearses. Sometimes mules were used. The carriages were in harness well into the 1930s since county roads at that time were often too narrow for automobiles. (Tarring also sold cars.) The carriages were destroyed in their storage-barn fire.

Tarring just sort of grew up in store and funeral management. Through graduation from the University of Virginia, four years of army service in World War II, several years at APG and twenty years with the National Brewing Company in Baltimore, he often helped as needed in the mortuary. He came full time to management and ownership in the 1970s and is an accredited funeral director and embalmer.

Besides his full time business, Tarring is involved in several civic and social activities, including the Association United States Army (AUSA)—liaison for civilian and military cooperation—and the Harford County Historic District Commission.

The next generation of Tarrings is not interested in continuing the family business. With that circumstance, Bob formed Tarring Funeral Home P.A. with partners Webster Macomber and Kenneth Cargo. These three and recently employed Robert Carver are the core full time staff with part and on-call help as needed for twenty four hour readiness.

Times and customs change. No longer do most children yearn to carry on their family business. And no longer are turn-of-century funeral customs as popular as they once were.
Many changes are noticeable: shorter ‘viewing’ of bodies in coffins; more closed coffins; more closed coffins; people of all races and religions using the same facilities; more deaths in institutions, rather than at home; more memorial services without the presence of the body; more services in churches or at gravesides, rather than in funeral chapels; more requests for charitable donations, rather than floral tributes; more autopsies; more organ donations; more cremations, rather than embalming and earth burial; more pragmatic attitudes about death and space needed for large coffins and burial vaults; changing philosophies.

Now on the horizon in Harford County: columbaria (dovecotes). As of 1982 countians of whatever religion can have their “ashes to ashes and dust to dust” remains placed in a consecrated niche in the columbarium beneath the sanctuary of Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Bel Air.

While these changes are evolving, they are more popular in large cosmopolitan areas than in relatively conservative communities such as Harford County.⁶

Tarring and others—including the clergy—recognize that cremation and final resting of sterile ashes in a small metal enclosure, where elaborate urns will not fit, may well be the ways of the future. At this point, it is to morticians’ advantage to keep customs as they are. But people have been dying and funerary practices have been going through cycles since The Beginning. And funeral establishments will no doubt change with the times.

⁶ Bristow files; correspondence with funeral directors 1976-83; personal experiences; conversations with friends; Sunpapers and AEgis obituary columns and death notices; recent and current popular and medical periodicals.

CONSUMER SURVIVAL KIT: The Last Rights: Funerals Md. Center for Public Broadcasting Owings Mills, MD 21117

Facts every family should know Wilbert, Inc. 1972 Currently available in local funeral homes

Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross lectures Harford Community College 1973; sponsored by Dist. No. 7 Nurses’ Assoc. and Cancer Soc. Towson State University 1982; sponsored by sociology dept.

The Tree of Life: A Tradition pamphlet re Emmanuel Episcopal Church’s columbarium 1982
FUNERAL ESTABLISHMENTS IN
HARFORD COUNTY 1983

(Dates of those begun in the 19th C are approximate due to the fact that, though in business—including 'undertaking—the firms' major role in funerals was crafting coffins.)

Arnold W. Beard Funeral Services Havre de Grace in place of venerable (ca. 1800) Pennington Funeral Home
Bullock's Mortuary (1936) Havre de Grace
Fleming Funeral Service Benson Formerly Archer Funeral Home
Foster Funeral Home (1922) Bel Air Descendant of Nathan Dean, later Dean & Foster
Kurtz Funeral Home (1844) Jarrettsville
Mitchell's Funeral Home (1924) Havre de Grace
Howard K. McComas III Funeral Home (1803) Abingdon
Tarring Funeral Home (1854) Aberdeen
Tittle's Funeral Home Bel Air

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