

The History
Of
Woodbine Farm
Upper Falls, Maryland

Circa 1794

Lewis Fleury II
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Woodbine Farm, located in Upper Falls, Maryland, has a rich heritage that often parallels and sometimes touches the history of Maryland and the nation from colonial times into the modern era. The purpose of this paper is to describe a few of these aspects from the more distant past and their relation to the property.

The Fleury family, present day owners of Woodbine, have a long held tradition that the original patent for the property was part of a grant from the third Lord Baltimore, Proprietor of Maryland, that has to some extent been passed down through the generations to the present day.¹

According to the tradition, Paul Aime Fleury sailed from La Rochelle, France in 1793, and arrived in Baltimore where he met and married Clare Young. They established their residence on a two hundred and seventy-three acre tract which Clare had inherited from her grandfather. They named this property Woodbine. It had been part of a much larger grant named Sewall's Fancy.

In order to understand Woodbine in a larger historical context, one must become familiar with a general history of Maryland. The colony was founded as a province in 1634, under the proprietorship of George Calvert and later passed to his son Cecil, second Lord Baltimore. George Calvert died in April of 1632, two years before the Ark and the Dove landed in

Maryland, leaving Cecil to guide the actual founding of the colony.²

As Proprietor, Cecil, a staunch Catholic and supporter of the King, acquired many rights over his new province. He planned to establish tobacco, as a cash crop for attaining revenue, while implementing a semi-fuedal plantation system. This system instituted land granting, manorial patenting, obligatory servitude, and headrighting. Those paying their own passage and that of five able bodied servants were granted from one to two thousand acres, and rose in social rank to the lord status. The new lord was then empowered to build and name his "manor" over which he ruled.³

In 1637 a frame work of government was established with the governor playing the leading role, supported by a Provincial Secretary, or custodian of all records, and a number of Councillors.⁴ In an attempt to assert control over this group Lord Baltimore appointed "men of Estate and Ability " to many of these posts. This was especially true of Charles Calvert, son of Cecil, who came to Maryland as governor in 1660, and later ascended to Lord Proprietor upon his father's death in 1676. To insure loyalty to the proprietor, Charles appointed numerous friends, family members, and wealthy Catholics to positions of power.⁵

A clear example of this was the case of his good friend Henry Sewall, who arrived with Calvert in 1660.⁶ Sewall was commissioned Councillor, Secretary, and Judge of the probate of wills for the Province on August 20, 1661, and held these

offices until his death.⁷ In September of 1661 he was granted two thousand acres, and later, in 1663, he received another thousand acres that had been surveyed for Charles Calvert and granted to Sewall the very next day. This property became Mattapany-Sewall Manor.⁸

In April of 1664, Sewall's will stated that he was planning to sail to England, and at a Council Meeting held September 6 of that year it was recorded that "Henry Sewall Esq., being called was returned absent in England."⁹ As his will was proved April 17, 1665 it can be assumed that he died during his visit.

Henry Sewall's story is of interest to us for not only does it lend insight into how Charles Calvert attempted to control his councillors and other political appointees through the alliance of friends (and as we shall see intermarriage), but also it sets the stage for our subsequent investigation of Woodbine Farm.

In 1666, not long after his friend Henry's death, Governor Calvert married his widow, Jane Lowe Sewall. This was advantageous for Calvert because through this marriage he gained three step-daughters and a step-son that could be married off for the purpose of bringing "proven men of substance" into his extended family.¹⁰ These stepchildren were married into prestigious families, who held, or soon would hold, positions of political prominence. These families, Burgess, Wharton, Digges, Rozer, Pye, Chandler, and Brent, while not all Catholics were part of Calvert's attempt at exerting control over the government. Beside these marriages, his youngest step-daughter,

Jane, married his uncle Philip Calvert. As time went on the offspring of these couples would intermarry with other prestigious families, such as Taskers, Loyds, Philemons, and Youngs.¹¹

It is Calvert's step-son, Major Nicholas Sewall who is of interest to us, as he was issued the original patent for Sewall's Fancy. Major Sewall was born in England in 1655 and came to Maryland with his father in 1660. He held many political positions beginning in 1682 when he was commissioned Secretary of the province and Councillor, a position he held until 1689. In 1684, when Lord Baltimore was leaving the province for England, he appointed his son Benedict Leonard Governor.¹² Since Benedict was a minor, Calvert also appointed a board of Deputy Governors to oversee the province, to which Major Nicholas Sewall was appointed. This board remained in power until the revolution of 1689.¹³

The revolt in England against James I which brought the protestant monarchs to the throne, triggered a revolt in Maryland against the Calverts, Catholic Proprietors. A body of armed "Protestant Associators" appeared before St. Mary's city (the capital of the province) and were victorious in a bloodless coup in which they assumed power, claiming to be the representatives of the new King and Queen of England. "The members of the Proprietary Council took refuge at Mattapany, where, unable to offer any effective resistance, they surrendered."¹⁴ This was the estate that Henry Sewall had received earlier, and had been regranted to his widow.¹⁵ Taking

this into consideration, and the fact that Nicholas was a member of the Council, it is most likely that he was present at the surrender. With this surrender, Major Sewall was obligated to vacate all his offices and retire to his estates in St. Mary's County.¹⁶

In the decades following the revolution, with a decrease in the influence of the Calverts, the first families of Maryland strengthened their own ties forming an elite gentry class obtaining wealth and power through the success of tobacco planting and market trade connections in England. Good health, previous wealth, family connections, and primagenator allowed for a consolidation of wealth and power among this group.¹⁷

As was common for men of his wealth and social position, Nicholas had acquired many properties in Anne Arundel, St. Mary's, and Baltimore Counties.¹⁸ One of these in Baltimore County was Sewall's Fancy. Originally, one thousand acres was surveyed in 1679 at the head of Gunpowder Falls. In 1683 was another two thousand acre tract was added.¹⁹

At this time Baltimore County was sparsely populated. While some patents had been laid out in the upper regions along the Chesapeake, few settlements had been established inland until the 1690's and 1700's, for fear of Indian attack. As was often the case during this period, the patentees did not immediately occupy the land. Instead these newly patented tracts were often considered as investments for the future--whether they be for speculative purposes or to pass on to one's children and grandchildren.²⁰

This was most probably true in the case of Major Sewall, for we find that not until 1741 was the property occupied. On April 7, 1733 Major Sewall gave to his daughter Clare Sewall Tasker²¹, by "Deed of Gift... 'Sewall's Fancy', a 1200 acre tract acquired by him in 1683."²² While little is known at this writing about the other 1800 acres Sewall had purchased, we do know that some time around 1741 Clare and her second husband, Col. William Young took possession of the estate and added to it a 375 acre tract named Nanjemoy.²³

The marriage of Col. Young and Clare Sewall Tasker is an example of how the elite gentry class consolidated their power. Col. Young's father, like Clare's, was a man of prominence within the colony. Also named William, he was Burgess in 1715, High Sheriff of Baltimore County in 1731, and Justice of the Quorum from 1731 to 1733.²⁴ Unlike Clare's father Nicholas, a Catholic, the Youngs were able to hold positions of power due to their Anglican faith. Therefore, not only is this an example of the consolidation of power among the elite families, but it also represents how many wealthy Catholics were able to maintain economic and political influence within the colony through intermarriage with prominent Protestants.

Col. Young himself held various political offices, including High Sheriff, Justice, and Deputy Commissioner.²⁵ As sheriff his duties would have included the collection of public taxes, selecting juries, and enforcing the laws of the colony. From the taxes he collected, he received a percentage plus an additional salary. The titles Justice and Deputy

Commissioner most likely refer to the same post, as both terms were often used due to the combination of administrative and judicial duties performed by courts.²⁶

Clare and Col. Young had one daughter, named Rebecca, who married Samuel Young in 1765. Little is known about Samuel Young except that he was associated with an estate called Young's Escape, also known as Francis' Freedom.²⁷ In searching the Rent Rolls, in fact, we find that Francis' Freedom is located near "the head of the Gunpowder,"²⁸ in the neighborhood of Sewall's Fancy.

Samuel Young is also listed as a member of the Committee of Observation in January of 1775,²⁹ representing Gunpowder Upper Hundred.³⁰ This committee had taken on many of the functions of government in the counties during the War for Independence. They bought arms, set prices and enforced the non-importation ban, among other duties. As time went on the committee became more radical, censuring dissension and confiscating the property of Loyalists.³¹

In his will, proved November 17, 1772, Col. Young leaves his grand-daughter Clare, her four siblings, and her half-brother,³² one sixth part each of his estates.³³ Included in this was the 263 acres located in the northern part of Sewall's Fancy that she named Woodbine.

On October 28, 1794 Clare married Paul Aime Fleury, a French immigrant.³⁴ As stated earlier, family tradition claims that in 1793 Paul Aime Fleury sailed from La Rochelle, France to America. Most of this tradition comes from a faded diary

that belonged to Paul Aime. Through magnification of the diary and subsequent investigation some doubt has been placed on the accuracy of this tradition. First of all, nowhere does the diary mention La Rochelle. Secondly, though the ink is faded, one of the pages begins, "I came in it 2nd America in June, in the year 1793."³⁵ The "2nd" is in the margin and is barely recognizable. The following page states that, "the 11th of July 1793, I went from Baltimore to Abingdon to learn the English language."³⁶ This seems to coincide with an article in the Maryland Historical Magazine that claims that Fleury was among five hundred people who had arrived in Baltimore Harbor on twenty-two ships during the night and early morning of July 9 and 10, 1793. These ships had left St. Domingo on June 23 in the wake of a violent slave uprising.³⁷

Though the dates don't match exactly, it is possible that the article was correct. Perhaps the ship Paul Aime was on landed somewhere in America during the voyage, before arriving in Baltimore. Or maybe, he was writing at a much later period and confused the date. The fact that he claimed to have left Baltimore the very day following the arrival of such a great number of French refugees seems to be more than mere coincidence. There could be any number of plausible explanations for the contradiction. Hopefully further investigation will reveal the answer.

At any rate, the article goes on to state that Paul Aime Fleury left Baltimore for the country. He kept a school at Upper Falls, but closed it after his marriage in October, 1794, to Clare Young and henceforth

superintended the planting of Woodbine his wife's farm in Baltimore County. Fleury's³⁸ descendants still live on the property.

Other parts of the diary can be read crystal clear. Some of these are pages dealing with the births and baptisms of his six sons. From his diary and letters we can tell that Fleury was a staunch Catholic. In fact, his son Samual was baptized by the "Reverend Bishop Carroll."³⁹ This no doubt is a reference to John Carroll, the first Archbishop of the United States!⁴⁰

As the history of the nation progressed, the life of the family members of Woodbine would continue to be shaped by its events. Some would move into Louisiana as that frontier opened up. Later, others would move out to the western frontier of California with the Gold Fever of the 1840's. Only one of Paul's sons would remain at Woodbine. This son was Benjamin Augustin.

The family has numerous letters, both from Louisiana and California to Augustin at Woodbine. They speak of many various aspects of our nations history from the perspective of the times. They deal with economics, slavery, the War Between the States, and other topics of national interest, as well as personal subjects.

For instance, one of the brothers, Henry, implored Benjamin to sell all his land, invest in slaves, and bring them to Louisiana where they would become rich together.⁴¹ Benjamin apparently resisted and remained on the farm. Later Henry wrote that it wasn't safe to travel; the nation was on the brink of war. He also said that he voted against Secession and that it would ruin the South.⁴² In August of 1865, Benjamin's niece

wrote^d that her brother was killed at the Battle of Shiloh and that their family was upon hard times.⁴³ These are examples of just a small portion of the information contained in these letters that link the family and Woodbine with the face of our nations history.

The history of any piece of property, or family as a whole, can be said to parallel history to some degree. In fact though, few are intertwined in such a way that they can be examined and documented as that of Woodbine Farm or the Fleury Family. The members of the family should feel lucky that they can link their past with that of the history of our state and nation.

There are still many questions to be answered and much more information to be uncovered. Hopefully,^d others will realize their unique heritage and attempt to add to what is already known. Not only is this information of interest to the family, but it can also be of great value to historians, enabling them to gain a perspective of the changing social and familial links that are represented by the story of Woodbine Farm.

ENDNOTES

¹ Lewis Fleury, Esq., interview by author, December 4, 1991.

² Matthew Page Andrews, Tercentenary History of Maryland (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1925), 7.

³ Robert J. Brugger, Maryland: A Middle Temperment: 1634-1980 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 14.

⁴ Aubrey C. Land, Colonial Maryland: A History (Millwood, N.Y.: K.T.O. Press, 1981), 38.

⁵ David W. Jordan, "Maryland's Privy Council, 1637-1715," in Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland, eds. Aubrey C. Land, Lois Green Carr, and Edward C. Papenfuse (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 65.

⁶ Jordan, "Maryland's Privy Council," 72.

⁷ Christopher Johnson, "Sewall Family," Maryland Historical Magazine 4 (November, 1909): 293.

⁸ Donnell MacClure Owings, "Private Manors: An Edited List," Maryland Historical Magazine 33 (December 1938): 329.

⁹ Johnson, "Sewall Family," 320.

¹⁰ Jordan, "Privy Council," 74.

¹¹ Johnson, "Sewall Family," 320.

¹² Benedict Leonard Calvert was Nicholas Sewall's half-brother and Charles Calverts only son. John Baily Calvert Nicklin, "The Calvert Family," Maryland Historical Magazine 16 (December, 1921): 389.

¹³ Johnson, "Sewall Family," 320-321.

¹⁴ Matthew Page Andrews, History of Maryland: Province

and State (Hatboro, Penns.: Tradition Press, 1965), 179.

¹⁵This property later came under Nicholas' ownership in 1722. Owings, "Private Manors," 329.

¹⁶Johnson, "Sewall Family," 321.

¹⁷Brugger, Maryland: Middle Temperment, 60.

¹⁸Robert Barnes and George Scriven comp., Maryland Rent Rolls: Baltimore and Anne Arundel Counties, 1700-1707, 1705-1724 (Baltimore: Geneological Publishing, 1976), 23, 31, 41, 43.

¹⁹Ibid., 41, 43.

²⁰Neal A. Brooks and Eric G. Rockel, A History of Baltimore County (Towson, Md.: Freinds of The Towson Library, 1979), 5-7.

²¹Clare's first husband, Thomas Tasker, died in 1733, but no exact date is given. Therefore, it is not known whether she was widowed at the time of the conveyance. Johnson, "Sewall Family," 321.

²²Edward Felix Jenkins, Thomas Jenkins of Maryland, 1670: His Descendants and Allied Families (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1985), 300.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Thomas W. Griffeth, Annals of Baltimore (Baltimore: William Woody, 1821), 30, 33.

²⁶Brooks and Rockel, History of Baltimore County, 18.

²⁷Willie B. Marye, "Baltimore City Place Names," Maryland Historical Magazine 59 (March, 1964): 80.

²⁸Barnes and Scriven, Maryland Rent Rolls, 54.

²⁹Thomas J. Scharf, History of Baltimore City and County (Baltimore: Regional Publishing, 1971), 71.

³⁰Baltimore County had been divided into seventeen "Hundreds" or districts, by 1774, in order to make administration more efficient. Brooks and Rockel, History of Baltimore County, 22.

³¹Ibid., 20.

³²This was Robert Young Stokes, son of Robert Stokes and Rebecca Young, who also inherited a tract known as Harman's Town, which later became Havre de Grace in Harford County. C. Milton Wright, Our Harford Heritage (Glen Burnie, Md.: French-Bray, 1967), 102, 310.

³³James M. Magruder Jr., Magruder's Maryland Colonial Abstracts: Wills, Accounts and Inventories: 1772-1777 (Baltimore: Geneological Publishing, 1968), 32.

³⁴Paul Aime Fleury, Diary, c.1793-1820. AMsS, 1.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 2.

³⁷Walter Charleton Hartridge, "The Refugees From the Island of St. Domingo in Maryland," Maryland Historical Magazine 38 (June, 1943): 103.

³⁸Ibid., 110-111.

³⁹Fleury, Diary, 5.

⁴⁰George and Virginia Shaun, Biographical Sketches of Maryland (Annapolis, Md.: Greenbury Publications, 1969), 42.

⁴¹Henry Fleury, Fort Jesup, La., to Benjamine Augustin Fleury, ALS, Upper Falls, Md., 25 April 1859. In the possession of Charles Fleury, Woodbine Farm, Upper Falls, Md.

⁴²Henry Fleury, Fort Jesup, La., to Benjamine Augustin Fleury, ALS, Upper Falls, Md., 15 April 1861. In the possession of Charles Fleury, Woodbine Farm, Upper Falls, Md.

⁴³Mary Fleury, Natchitoches, La. to Benjamin Augustin Fleury, ALS, Upper Falls Md., 16 August 1865. In the possession of Charles Fleury, Woodbine Farm, Upper Falls, Md.