walked over to the hospital, and started the next day. For example, 1972 graduate Jeff Barnes started work at Springfield the Monday after his graduation. His new supervisor was also his mother.

If the hospital hadn't been there to draw people to the town and employ those already there, it's likely everyone would have left. Instead they stayed—whole generations of them.

Known as the Maryland Department of Health's Springfield Hospital Center today, the facility is much smaller now, housing just 250 psychiatric patients. It shares the campus with the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission, but both operations combined don't come close to filling the acres of empty buildings, many of which were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2000.

Modern-day Sykesville is more or less a bedroom community, where everyone commutes out to work. But nonetheless, it's a thriving town that has reinvented itself in recent years. You can still visit George Patterson there beneath his headstone of Italian marble, up in the old churchyard by the Springfield Presbyterian church where they buried his son, his daughter, and his wife. Frank Brown's parents are also there, right beside the Pattersons, all buried together and surrounded by an old black iron fence.

But if you want to visit Frank Brown's grave, you'll have to go to Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore. You'll also find William Patterson there. And Betsy. You just won't find them together.

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Legacy of Ambition: The Pattersons, Browns, and the Founding of Sykesville

By Jack White

Editor's Note: *About a year ago I visited the author at Sykesville's Gatehouse Museum where he serves as curator. When I posed a few questions about Springfield State Hospital, Jack asked if I had a few minutes. I said I did and expected more informal talk. Instead, he suggested we take a ride. Within minutes, we were on the hospital's sprawling campus and driving by a mind-boggling assortment of boarded-up, red brick, Georgian buildings. It looked like a vast and regal ghost town, its countless blank windows staring back at us. Jack pointed out a mansion that was a replica of the one George Patterson built in the early 1800s. The original was destroyed by fire in 1912. I thought to myself, "There's a story here ..."* FJB

"About one mile from the village of Sykesville stands the "Springfield" Presbyterian Church and parsonage, and through skeleton branches of trees at the back of the church the wintry gleam of white marble above the frozen snow marks where lie George Patterson and his descendants... Within the inclosed grave-lot there are several costly monuments and a newly-made grave where, January 12th, 1883, was buried Prudence Ann, widow of George Patterson."

Mary W. Imlay, "An Old Maryland Homestead," 1883

The Death of a Noble Boy

It was December, just short of Christmas in 1849. Zachary Taylor had recently succeeded James Polk as President. (Both would be dead within a year.) The United States had defeated Mexico in a short, dirty war. Texas had joined the union, and thousands rushed to California in search of gold. The country was expanding and bitterly divided between North and South over the spread and very existence of slavery.

But at that moment, inside Springfield Presbyterian, none of this mattered. It was cold, and for George and Prudence Patterson, it was also bitter and painful, and the culminating moment of a nightmare that had taken too long to unfold.

There was a small box, and outside, a hole in the hard ground. The Reverend Thomas James Shepherd stood before the mourners and spoke without notes:

> I can imagine no affliction more crushing to parental hearts than that of the death of a noble boy. It interrupts so many plans; it darkens so many prospects; it blights so

many hopes; it flings such heavy gloom upon one's home and over the sky of one's life; that its intensity of sorrow must surely be extreme.

The boy's name was also George Patterson. He had lived five years, three months, and 12 days, before dying of a long, unidentified illness four days short of Christmas. Until very recently, he'd been constantly at his father's side, as they walked the grassy fields of the family's vast *Springfield* estate. But today his mother and father, their family and friends, gathered around his open grave as Rev. Shepherd prayed, "O God, we lay this body in the grave that, as Thou ordainest, the dust may return to the Earth as it was. Let thine eye of love be on it; let thy hand of power keep it."

After the funeral, the Pattersons asked Shepherd for a copy of the service, and it is there we learn that young George was the "companion of his father from the time he could speak and walk." And that the "last word caught by those who weeping bent over him, was the sweet word *Father*, which [he] repeated until his lips grew motionless in death, and, from his manner, evidently addressed to God." And that a few days before dying, he told his father, "You are not my only father: I have a Father in Heaven."

Born Into Wealth

The boy's father, George Patterson, was the sixth and youngest son of William Patterson, who was born in County Donegal, Ireland, in 1752. Fourteen years later, William arrived in Philadelphia, possibly unaccompanied, to seek his fortune. By 21 he owned two ships and his own maritime business. When the British embargoed arms and powder from reaching the Colonies at the beginning of the American Revolution, Patterson invested everything he owned and took off with his ships to the Caribbean in hopes of arming the rebellion.

George Patterson, Squire of Springfield.
(Alamy Stock Photos)

First, he supplied Washington's forces from the Dutch island of Saint-Eustatius and then from the French possession of Martinique. He returned to America in 1778 with over a hundred thousand dollars, married 17-year-old Dorcas Spear, settled in Baltimore, bought property, built ships, and became one of the wealthiest men in Maryland.

William and Dorcas had 13 children. Elizabeth, known as Betsy, was the only daughter to survive into adulthood. She would become one of the most famous women in the world, while their youngest son, George, would become a superb farmer and one of the most important founders of what would someday become the town of Sykesville.

In the late 1700s, William Patterson acquired some 1,700 acres of mostly wooded land about 30 miles west of Baltimore as a family estate and retreat from the hot, unpleasant summers of the city. He named the estate *Springfield*, and over time, the family developed the land and built a mansion there described by Mary W. Imlay as a "roomy

Brown was a skilled farmer, a superb politician, a shrewd businessman, and an entrepreneur, who split his time between Baltimore and *Springfield*. He became the dominant figure in the area, building roads and streets and succeeding spectacularly at everything he tried.

Sykesville was a tourist town in the second half of the 19th century, and Brown built a row of some 40 cottages, connected by a boardwalk, and including a central dining facility. The resort catered to wealthy residents of Baltimore who flocked to the area by train each summer to escape the city's intolerable stench and heat.

Governor Frank Brown, c.1890.
(HSCC Collection)

Brown was a Democrat and a shrewd political operator who ran campaigns, helped get men elected, and served as postmaster of Baltimore. In 1892, campaigning as "farmer Brown," "the farmer's friend," and other slogans of that nature, he ran for governor and won easily. But after his wife died during his mostly uneventful term in office, he lost his bid for reelection following a huge backlash against the Democratic Party. Like his aunt Prudence before him, he also lost interest in *Springfield* and farming.

In 1896, when his term as governor ended, Brown sold about 600 acres for $50,000 to the state for the building of Springfield Hospital, originally named The Second Maryland Hospital for the Insane. Eventually he sold all his land and settled in Baltimore, where he remained active in politics, and was often seen riding a horse through the city's parks. He died after a long illness in 1920.

The Legacy

Sykesville's Springfield Presbyterian, the church that George Patterson built with Frank Brown's father, still stands. The community's oldest church, it is sturdy, plain in appearance, and gray as a battleship. It commands the highest point in town and once provided a view from its steps into the distance to the large and beautiful Patterson mansion.

Most of the cottages Frank Brown built also still stand, although they've been updated and built around and are barely recognizable. The huge gothic mansion above Norwood Avenue that hovers over the town like something out of a horror movie, started life as one of Brown's humble cottages.

But most important to the health and history of the town of Sykesville is the hospital that the state built, and kept expanding, on the 1,300 acres that once belonged to the Pattersons and then Frank Brown. The massive old mansion that the Pattersons constructed and Brown lived in served as a home for the hospital's first two superintendents before burning to the ground in 1912. The state built another mansion on the same spot with input from Frank Brown and named it the Patterson House. It is still there today, although it no longer serves any important function for the hospital.

By 1950, the hospital had 79 buildings, 4,000 patients, and several hundred employees, and had become a virtually self-sustaining city. Though the town itself had few places to work, there was always work at Springfield. Kids graduated from Sykesville High School,

composure, and truly, without fear and without reproach, he went down to the tomb."

He was 74 when he died, and although he had lost his son, he would at least be spared the added sorrow of losing his only daughter, Florence. Prudence would go through that alone.

Prudence Brown Patterson

Prudence Patterson was 21 years younger than George and 32 when they buried their son. She was a member of the locally prominent, but much less wealthy, Brown family, and aunt to Frank Brown, who would later become the only person from Carroll County ever elected governor of Maryland.

George Patterson was over 40 when he finally decided to marry. Prudence Ann Brown was not his first choice, but when Ann Elizabeth Warfield refused his proposal, he turned to Prudence, and she accepted. Prudence was a kind and generous person who offset her husband's rough nature and brought a new charm and hospitality to *Springfield*.

They had a daughter they named Florence, who was two years old when young George died, and it seems both children inherited their mother's good nature. George was considerate beyond his years and apologized to his mother on his deathbed for any pain he might have caused her, and Florence is described as loving, friendly, and always laughing.

Imlay compared Florence favorably at her famous aunt Betsy's expense:

> Florence… had not the brilliant wit of her aunt, but a far more loving and lovable disposition…. No unwise ambition or struggle after the unattainable marred her life, for Florence Patterson loved her home, her kindred and her country as heartily as the imperious elder woman despised them. She was married September 1877, to Mr. James Carroll, of Baltimore. There was a gay and festive scene at the old manor-house to celebrate the union, but in a few fleeting months the friends who met at the bridal gathered around her bier!

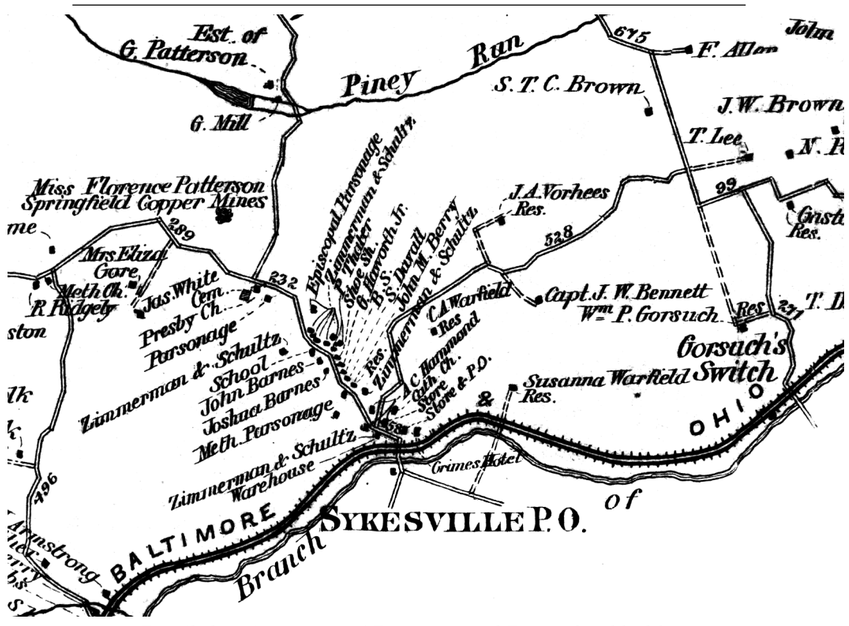
Less than a year after her marriage, Florence died while giving birth. She was 31. Her baby died with her, and is buried with her, too, in the Springfield Cemetery, beneath a stone that says, "Resting on her breast, the body of her infant son."

After Florence died, both her husband, James Carroll, and her mother lost interest in *Springfield*, and sold the land to their relation Frank Brown in 1880. James died years later in Atlantic City. Prudence retired to Baltimore, where she died in 1883.

Frank Brown

Frank Brown was Florence Patterson's first cousin. His father, Stephen T. C. Brown, was Prudence Patterson's brother. Frank eventually came into possession of both his father's farm and the adjacent *Springfield* farm, combined them, and created one of the largest and most profitable farms in Maryland.

Patterson family plot, Springfield Presbyterian Church Cemetery. (Courtesy of Gate House Museum)



Detail showing extent of Patterson and Brown land holdings. (*An Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County, Maryland*, 1877)

country home, having a frontage of one hundred and seventy-five feet, adorned by two-story pillared porches.…flanked by an extensive park, and… a velvety lawn sloping down the hill to the front entrance."

William Patterson was hugely successful in business. He became the first president of the Bank of Maryland and one of the founders of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. There is a park named in his honor in Baltimore, but he is probably best known to history because of his turbulent relationship with his famously rebellious and beautiful daughter, Betsy. Her passionate and ill-fated love affair with young Jerome Bonaparte made her an international celebrity.

Madame Jerome Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte by George D'Almaine, c.1856. (Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society, Item ID #: xx.5.78)

There are various accounts of how Betsy endeavored to meet the dashing brother of the famous Napoleon Bonaparte. Some are ridiculous. One involves encountering Jerome at a horse race in Baltimore. Another has her locked in her room in the *Springfield* mansion by her father to keep her from attending a ball in Baltimore. Undeterred, Betsy escaped out a window, and rode to the city in the dark of night on a mule, with a slave on another mule beside her, carrying her ball gown. Supposedly Jerome and Betsy met and danced through the evening straight into history.

Betsy herself insisted the couple met at a Baltimore dinner party hosted by a French aristocrat and soon fell quickly in love.

Regardless of how they became acquainted, her father had stern objections to the whole affair, which Betsy ultimately overcame. She and Jerome wed in Baltimore in 1803, with the country's first Roman Catholic bishop, John Carroll, presiding. Betsy was 18. Jerome, who had lied to the Pattersons about his age, barely 19.

Napoleon, who would soon declare himself

Emperor of France, was determined to marry his siblings into European royalty. When he learned of his wayward brother's marriage to this young American, he was furious and set out to put an end to it, even going so far as petitioning the Pope to have the union annulled. The Pope refused. But Napoleon had other means of reining in his wayward brother.

By 1849 when they buried her young nephew George, Betsy was old news. Napoleon had successfully destroyed her marriage to Jerome without the Pope's assistance. The couple did have a son, born in England, not long after their final parting in Lisbon, Portugal, when they promised each other a reunion that would never take place. Jerome eventually remarried at Napoleon's command and became king of Westphalia, a small, country his brother basically created for him. Betsy raised their son well and never married again.

When young George Patterson died, Betsy was 64 and no longer the "Belle of Baltimore." She lived in Europe and had broken ties with the rest of the family over money. Still she remained on good terms with her brother George.

When she eventually returned to the U.S., spending her final years in Baltimore, she would often come by train to visit her brother's family at *Springfield*, where sometimes a boy named Frank Brown would escort her around the grounds. She outlived the rest of the family she'd feuded with all her life, and died in 1879 at the age of 94. She is buried in Green Mount Cemetery in Baltimore, the hometown she despised as a "dirty little commercial hole."

The Son Takes Over

William Patterson died in 1835. In 1828 he had sold the *Springfield* property for five dollars to George, who was already deeply involved in developing the plantation and would run it for five decades.

A letter to the editor of the *Sykesville Herald* in 1915 described his plantation as "one of the finest in the State…twenty-six hundred acres…. His slaves were the finest specimen of physical manhood of any slaves… in the South. His horses, cattle, hogs and chickens were not excelled by any in the United States." The 1850 Carroll County agricultural census credits him with 30 horses, 85 head of dairy cows and cattle, 150 swine, and 500 sheep. His land produced 2,000 bushels of wheat and 5,000 bushels of Indian corn, along with quantities of rye and oats.

As detailed in Brantz Mayer's *Baltimore: Past and Present*, Patterson became "one of the first agriculturists in the country—a deep student of the principles of scientific farming and a splendid exponent of their practical results. He expended large sums in lime, principally, and other fertilizers, and forced poor soil into realizing richness. He devoted himself, also, to the raising of stock… to make of his property a great grazing farm…. His Devon [cattle] herd was, probably, one of the finest in the world, and beyond compare the finest in America." According to Imlay, they "could be seen grazing in luxuriant clover-fields at Springfield, their fat sides glistening in the sunshine like polished mahogany."

Patterson was a stubborn man and physically brave. As a large slaveholder in a state divided over the issue, he most likely sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War, and was determined to defend *Springfield* at any cost. A possibly apocryphal 1871 account in *Baltimore: Past and Present* describes an encounter between Patterson and the Union army:

> A party of Federal soldiers invaded his premises, marched up to his house, and sought, in opposition to his remonstrance, to enter. Mr. Patterson, who, with the exception of the presence of his wife, was alone, with great coolness and with equal determination placed himself within his doorway, and confronting the officer in command, demanded on what authority his house was to be entered. The officer, putting his hand on the hilt of his sword, replied, "My authority is here." "Then," said Mr. Patterson, raising his left hand and grasping his revolver with his right, "cross that threshold and I will kill you!" The officer and party retired.

In 1836, Patterson and his future father-in-law, Stephen T. C. Brown, built Springfield Presbyterian Church on land that Patterson donated. It is the oldest church in Sykesville.

In 1844, a young lawyer named Isaac Van Bibber visited Sykesville seeking donations to build what was to become the Church of the Ascension in Westminster. He wrote in his diary, "I arrived at Sykesville. Here I met with Mr. Warfield, who very pressingly invited me to come to see him. At the same time I met Mr. Sykes, who gave me permission to put his name down on my subscription list for 10 dollars. Leaving Sykesville I rode immediately to Mr. Patterson's, whom I found at some distance from his house, sitting on a log reading a newspaper.

"He asked me what it was all about. I told him it related to the building of an Episcopal Church in Westminster, at which he shook his head, saying that he would have nothing more to do with the building of Churches, as he looked upon them as causes of contention in the neighborhood." No doubt Patterson was referring to his own experience building a church of a different denomination eight years earlier.

Van Bibber continued, "I…told him that I would most gratefully receive anything that was offered. To this he made no reply,

Sykesville's Springfield Presbyterian Church, 2020. (Courtesy of Sykesville Gate House Museum)

pretending to be deeply engrossed with an exquisite representation of some steam cars at the head of one of the columns of the newspaper. Finding his thoughts in such *a train*, I bid him good morning, and receiving a very polite salutation in reply, rode away. Thus vanished my golden dream of a handsome donation from the wealthy Mr. Patterson."

Imlay described Patterson as "a man of marked character—more English than American in type. He had a short, heavy figure, a face stern yet handsome, and lighted by keen blue eyes under bushy brows. He showed strong intellect, much general knowledge and dogmatic views…. Of strict probity, he was yet brusque in speech, dictatorial in manner, and cared not a whit for the pomps of rank in which his sister delighted."

After that cold Christmas funeral, Patterson lived another 20 years with his wife, his daughter, and the memory of his son. When his own death approached in November of 1869, a year after a great flood washed away almost the entire town of Sykesville, *Baltimore Past and Present* noted, "He met death with