

May 14, 1973

Dear John,

Many thanks for your kind help on this project. It was above and beyond the call of duty.

I accept all responsibility for the mistakes which may appear herein. The typing is something else!

Regards,

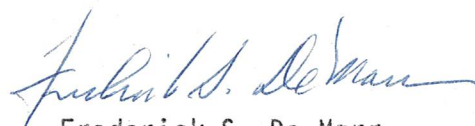
Fred

P.S. I neglected to mention the pressed-tin ceiling in St. Mary's which is a product of the 1890, extensive and remodeling. This painted ceiling is quite unusual and is a gem in my estimation. Although it is not in keeping with the ceiling of the new transept or nave, I feel that it should by all means be retained and restored. In many ways it is quite unique and I feel that it should be retained.

Fred.

THE PRE-CIVIL WAR ARCHITECTURE  
OF  
LAUREL, MARYLAND

A Preliminary Study



Frederick S. De Marr  
May 1973

A GENEALOGICAL TRACING OF THE SNOWDEN FAMILY

(1) Richard "The Immigrant"

(2) Richard

(3) Richard "The Ironmaster"  
(d. 1763)

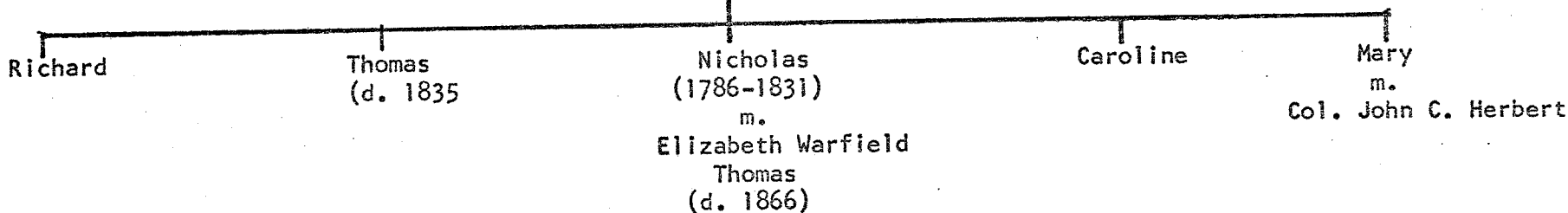
(4) Thomas  
(1722-1770)

(5) Major Thomas  
(1751-1803)

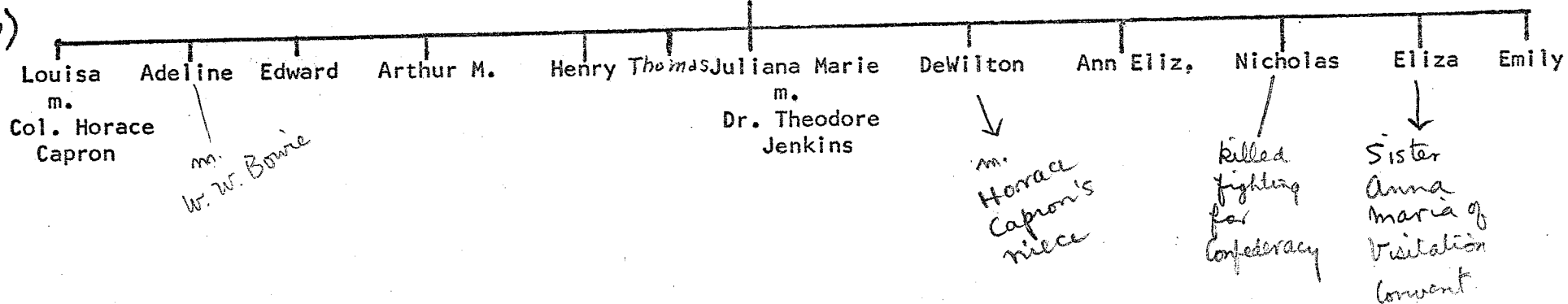
m.  
Ann Ridgely  
(d. 1834)

→ buried in Birmingham Manor graveyard  
(within confines of St. Meade)

(6)



(7)



## Historical Background

Two ingredients influence the architecture of a particular region or town: environment and people. Environment governs economic activity which in turn determines the types of structures which are built. The terrain of the environment dictates the varieties of materials available for construction. Likewise the people with their ethno-cultural backgrounds and mechanical or professional skills will utilize the fruits of the environment to produce homes for themselves and their economic pursuits. In so doing they will employ styles and building techniques which are collectively known as architecture.

In most towns many people of diverse backgrounds and vocational training who are embarking upon a variety of economic interests will accomplish the architectural decor. Laurel, Maryland, located on the Patuxent River in the northernmost part of Prince George's County, is an exception to this rule. It is an exception because one family, the Snowdens, and one economic activity, a mill, largely determined the course of its architectural development during its first half-century.

The Snowden family dominated Laurel because all of the land in the area was controlled by them from earliest times. In the sixth generation Nicholas Snowden would erect a grist mill on the Patuxent about 1811. <sup>(1)</sup> A small settlement would begin. It remained for Nicholas' son-in-law, Col. Horace Capron, to expand this enterprise into a large-scale industry which would dominate the town prior to the Civil War.

The first Snowden, Richard, "The Immigrant", came from Wales in 1658 and patented New Birmingham Manor (12, ~~238~~<sup>260</sup> acres) located on the Patuxent's upper reaches in Anne Arundel County, then the hinterland of the Province of Maryland. <sup>(2)</sup> This Richard's grandson, Richard, "The Ironmaster", would establish a

foundry utilizing iron ore deposits on Birmingham Manor during the first half of the 18th century. Along with farming it would provide the source of the family's wealth. <sup>(3)</sup> Additional purchases, convenient marriages and primogeniture would cause the lands to more than double over five generations. However, upon the death of Major Thomas Snowden of "Montpelier", the vast holdings were to be divided among his widow, Ann Ridgely, and his four living children: Richard, Thomas, Nicholas and Mary. <sup>(4)</sup> During the <sup>11th?</sup> seventh generation the Snowden empire would be obliterated. Upon the death of bachelor Thomas the lands would be sold in order to assure equal division of the assets between his many heirs; Mary Snowden Herbert, his sister, and the twelve children of brother Nicholas. <sup>(5)</sup> Mary's lands would be divided among her several children.

Major Thomas Snowden's lands encompassed a large portion, about 30,000 acres, of the Patuxent River valley in Anne Arundel, Howard, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. Nicholas' share of the real estate, about 6,000 acres, were largely in Prince George's, situated along the Patuxent and stretching <sup>(6)</sup> from the Montgomery County line eastward toward present-day Bowie, Maryland. When Nicholas built his grist mill in 1811 it was not his intention to found a town, as was the pattern established by so many entrepreneurs before and after him in other regions.

In the early years, settlement was limited to a few rude huts around the mill. To the east on the new Baltimore-Washington Turnpike, a tavern served as a way-station for the stage lines. <sup>(7)</sup> The eventual conversion of the mill to the manufacture of yarn and then cotton cloth, the death of Nicholas Snowden in 1831, and the entry of Col. Horace Capron on the scene brought industry on a large scale and the expansion of the area into a town.

According to local tradition the locality of the mill was known as "The Laurel" because of the abundance of that native shrub on the high banks of the Patuxent. <sup>(8)</sup> The Washington Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was opened

from Baltimore(Relay) to Washington in 1835. (9) In 1837 a post office was  
established and named Laurel Factory. (10) Earlier service had been pro-  
vided from Vansville(Beltsville) to the south on the Turnpike.

The structures of Laurel Factory, besides the cotton mill, included houses for the workers, a residence for Nicholas Snowden, a meeting place and three houses of worship. A smaller mill was later added. In building these structures a native reddish-brown stone was used for the walls. A few bricks were also burned from local clay. An adequate supply of timber provided beams and planks for the roofs and floors. These fruits of the labor of the early residents were solid, functional buildings; the majority of which have lasted to this time.



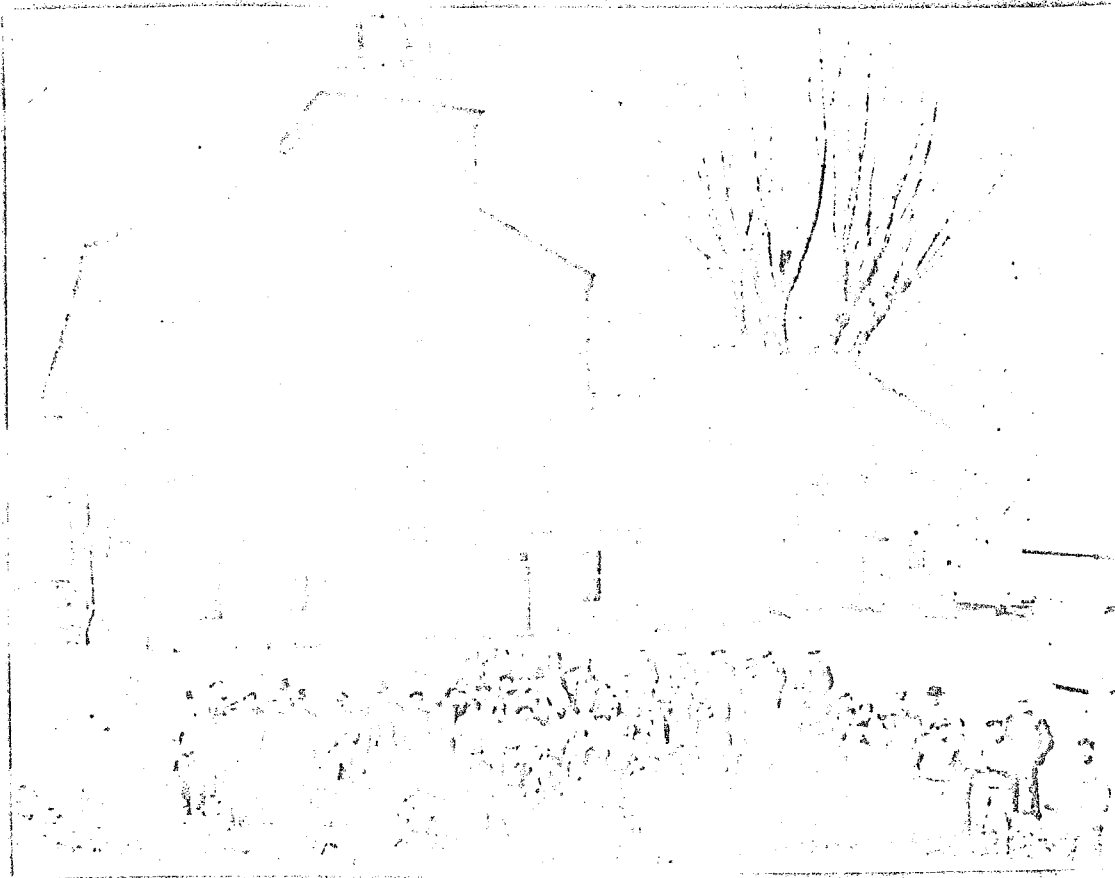
STRUCTURES EXAMINED

1. Laurel Mills	ca. 1811 - ca. 1855	Destroyed
2. Mill Workers' Houses	ca. 1811 - ca. 1850	
3. Snowden-Capron House (Superintendent's House)	ca. 1802 (?)	Destroyed
4. Assembly Hall	1840	Destroyed
5. Methodist Church	1842	Destroyed
6. St. Mary of the Mills Roman Catholic Church	1843	
7. Avondale Mill	ca. 1844	
8. St. Philip's Episcopal Church	1848	

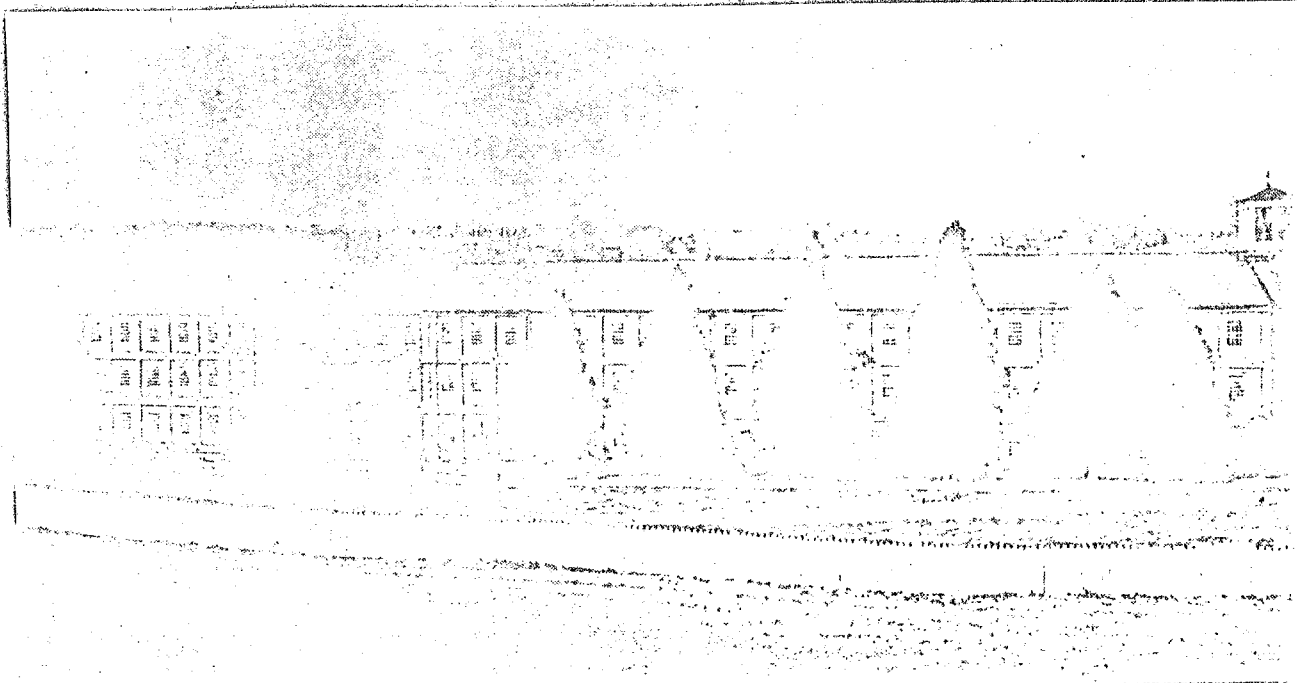
OTHER STRUCTURES\*

1. Talbot Mansion	ca. 1850	
2. Avondale Street Houses (2 or 3)	ca. 1845	
3. Residence on Main Street next to Odd Fellows' Hall	ca. 1860	(Tom Tapscott)
4. Odd Fellows' Hall	1860	

\* Subsequently discovered during this study, but not treated by it.



The Laurel Mill, looking west from Ninth Street.  
To the right is the Patuxent River. (Date of photo-  
graph unknown.)



Laurel Mill looking north. The river is located  
behind the buildings. (Date of photograph unknown.)

## 11.

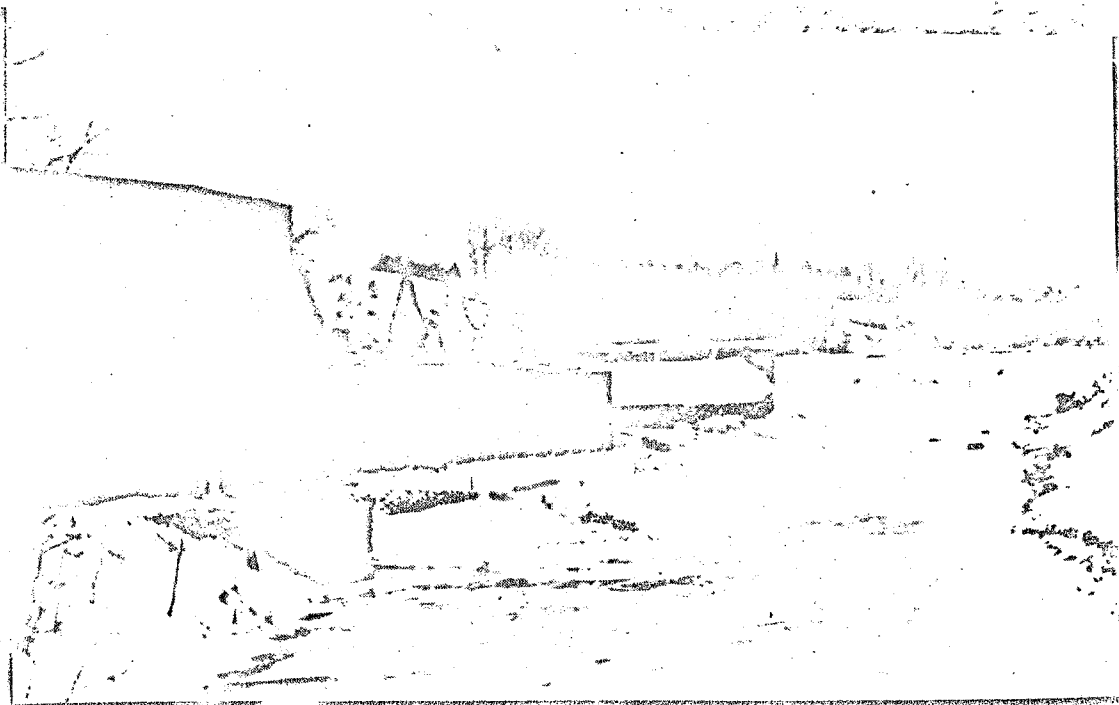
### The Laurel Mill

#### A. History

James Albert Clark, Editor of the Free Quill, stated in his historical sketch of 1894 that Nicholas Snowden erected a stone mill just below the dam site as early as 1811. This was a flour mill which served the farmers of the area, and its output was taken by wagon to Elkridge Landing on the Patapsco River for shipment. (1) Later Snowden leased the grist mill to William Johnson in 1824 for a term of 12 years and during this period Johnson converted it into a factory for spinning cotton yarn. This yarn was also shipped to Elkridge for ~~spinning~~ <sup>weaving</sup> elsewhere. "Some years later" the first loom for weaving cloth was introduced and a brick building was erected for this purpose. (2)

The proceedings of the Maryland High Court of Chancery give a slightly different story. On March 13, 1830 William Johnson and John Watson, partners trading as John Watson and Company, entered into an eight year lease with Nicholas Snowden for the "cotton factory, grist mill and saw mill, house and 40 or 50 acre field on which it stands contiguous to the factory." (3) The leasees agreed to carry \$5,000 fire insurance, of which \$3,800 was for the mills and \$1200 covered the house in which Johnson was living. (4)

Johnson and Watson had appealed to the Chancery Court because they had not filed the lease with the Clerk of the Court within the prescribed period, and in the meantime Nicholas Snowden had died. The court ordered that this lease be put into effect. (5) The date and terms of this transaction do not agree with historian Clark's information, however the parties are the same. It may be that an earlier lease existed between Snowden, Johnson and Watson; but it has not been located. When Nicholas' Snowden's lands were divided among his widow and twelve children in 1834, the mill property consisting of 93 acres valued at \$25,000 was left intact and held by all of his heirs. The annual income under the William Johnson lease was fourteen hundred dollars. (6)



The Laurel Mill and mill dam, looking west. In the far distance of the color photo may be seen the remains of the dam.

In 1836 the General Assembly of Maryland incorporated the Patuxent Company for the purposes of manufacturing and selling cotton, iron and other articles. Associated with Horace Capron in this venture were his brother-in-law, Edward Snowden; his brother-in-law ~~by marriage~~, Dr. Theodore Jenkins; W. C. Shaw; A. E. Hall; and O. C. Tiffany, a wholesale cotton merchant of Baltimore. The capitalization was to be \$200,000 with shares valued at \$100 each.

Horace Capron was born in Attleboro, Massachusetts in 1804 and was raised in Whitesboro, New York, where he worked in his father's cotton mill. In 1829 he was superintendent of the Printing Cloth Works in Warren, Baltimore County, Maryland. After this factory burned, Capron was employed at the Savage Factory, a few miles north of Laurel Factory on the Little Patuxent River. Horace Capron married Louisa Snowden at "Montpelier" on June 5, 1834, about the time that the estate of her father, Nicholas, was being settled.

Because of the lack of records from the Patuxent Company and the absence of a recorded case on Nicholas Snowden in the High Court of Chancery records (Snowden died intestate), the intricacies of the ownership and financing of the mill operation under Capron's regime are nebulous. In general, the conclusion may be reached that it was Snowden money which Capron was using. As heiress to half of the vast Thomas Snowden estate, Mary Snowden Herbert indicated to the Court of Chancery that Capron, the estate's executor, had her permission to invest the funds in the mill enterprise. As indicated earlier, funds of Edward Snowden and Theodore Jenkins were involved.

A substantial investment was involved in the mill expansion and construction of the Assembly Hall and the workers' houses. In 1846 a large four-story machine shop for the manufacture of cotton machinery was built on Main Street at a cost of forty-seven thousand dollars. Although business was good, the large initial cost of construction and equipment contributed to its almost immediate failure.

While engaging in manufacturing, Capron apparently spent large sums on

fertilizer to improve the worked-out agricultural lands inherited by his wife. His efforts at creating a model farm attracted attention for over a decade among agricultural circles and leading farm journals. (15) According to Mr. Clark of the Free Quill, commenting upon Capron's eventual total financial embarrassment with reference to the mill enterprise, "it is claimed by others that the extravagance in the large farm was the cause, and, assuredly, those who claim both did it, must be nearer right." (16) In 1849 creditors pushed Capron to the wall. O. C. Tiffany's Baltimore firm bid in the mill and continued to operate it. (17) During the same year Louisa Snowden Capron died and her husband left Laurel Factory shortly thereafter, never to return. (18)

The mill continued to have a spotty history. Tiffany's son, who succeeded Capron, soon failed in the enterprise. Operations were suspended during the early years of the Civil War and again in 1870. (19) During the early 1920's the property was sold twice. (20) In the mid-1940's the abandoned buildings were torn down. (21)

Today the site is owned by the City of Laurel and the municipal swimming pool is located there. Only the end walls of the dam and mill race remain as mute reminders of the industry which gave birth to the town. Such was the fate of a factory which, in Capron's time, had a weekly output of 60,000 yards of cloth. (22)

#### B. Architectural Comment

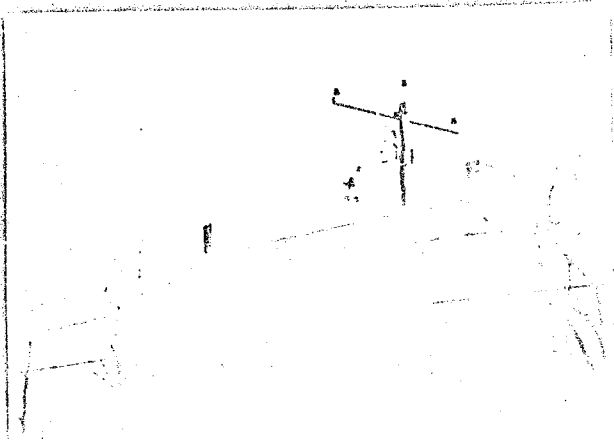
Undated photographs of the Laurel Mill indicate that it was a series of structures built end-to-end, stretching from the dam downriver to the junction of Ninth Street (Yellow Row) and Main Street. Five separate units, apparently built at different times, comprised the main block. Facing Ninth Street an additional brick structure was located on the river side.

The largest unit of the main block was brick. The others appear to be of the same material although it is difficult to determine this from the picture.

The main unit had a square tower running the full height of the structure, topped by an open belfry. In appearance these structures represent the typical factory buildings of the mid-1800's. The walls were built with protruding columns to give extra strength for support of the heavy machinery. Multiple fenestration provided the necessary light for the workers, but drapes were placed on all of the windows to block out the blinding sun if necessary.

Whether any portion of Nicholas Snowden's grist mill, or William Johnson's operation remained into the 20th century is unknown. The photographs cause doubt that they did. These structures appear to be ones of the vintage of the Patuxent Company, dating from the 1835-1850 period. There is record of a disastrous fire in 1855. <sup>(23)</sup> To what extent the walls of the mill had to be rebuilt at that time is open to conjecture.

The Laurel Mill was similar in appearance to every other mill of its type and period. All mills were functional structures and the work being done inside determined the exterior appearance. Although the structure could have been designed by an architect, it is believed that an experienced mill superintendent could have produced the plans and supervised the construction. The absence of the mill company records leaves this question permanently in doubt.

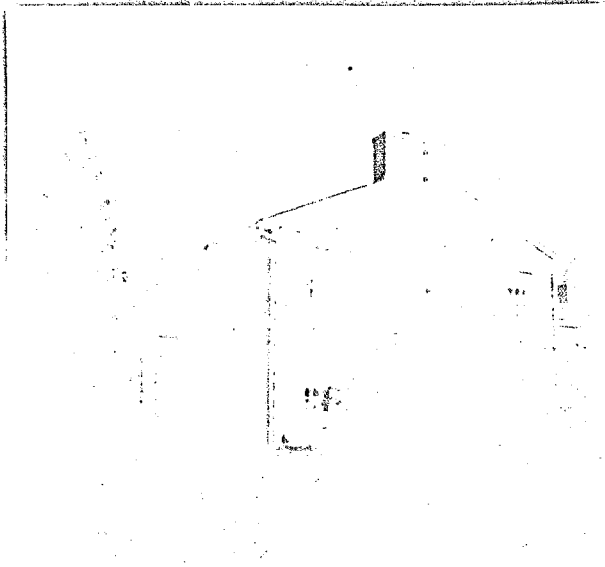
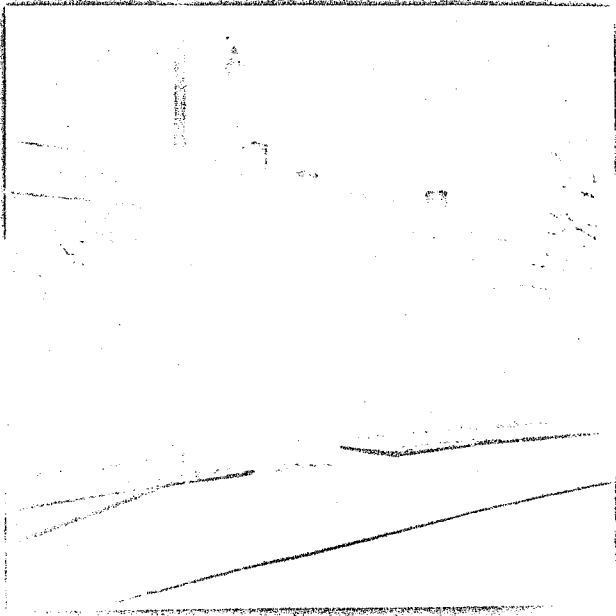


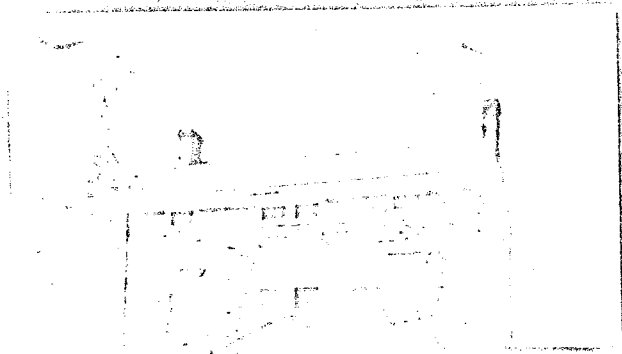
THE MILL HOUSES

704-706 Main Street

712-714 Main Street

708-710 Main Street





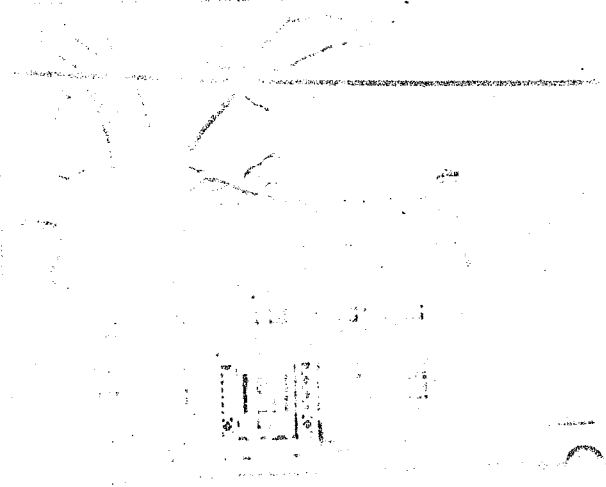
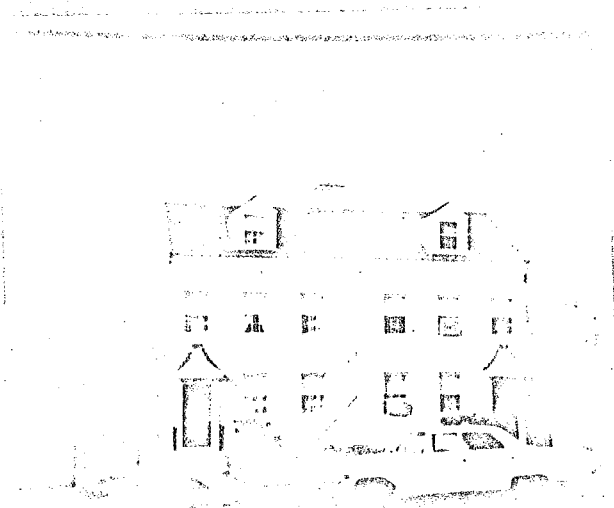
703 Main Street

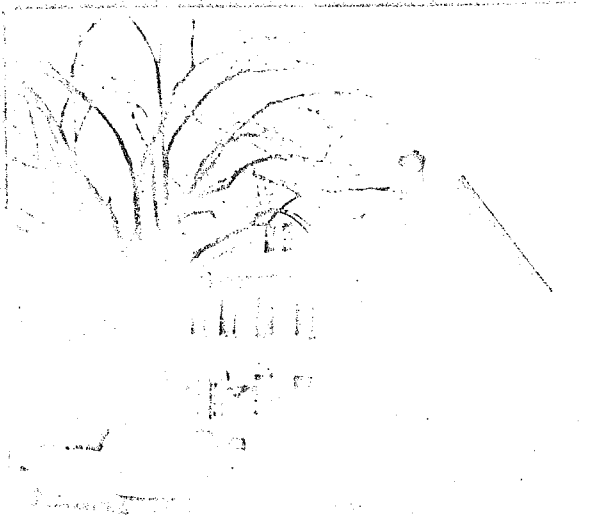
707 Main Street  
Built by James Gary in 1843.  
(Mrs. St. Clair's House)

*directly opposite  
(Krauskis')*

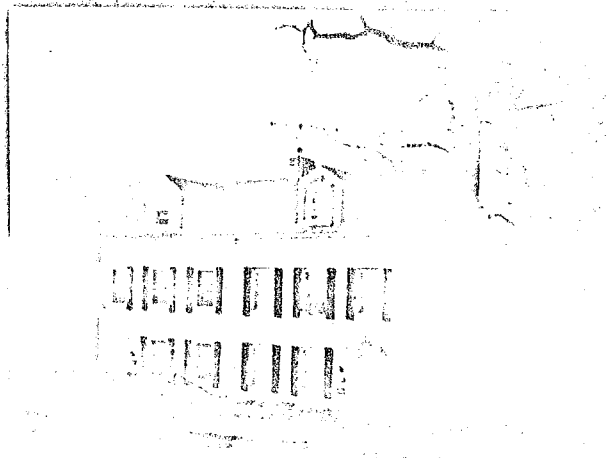
803-801 Main Street

715 Main Street





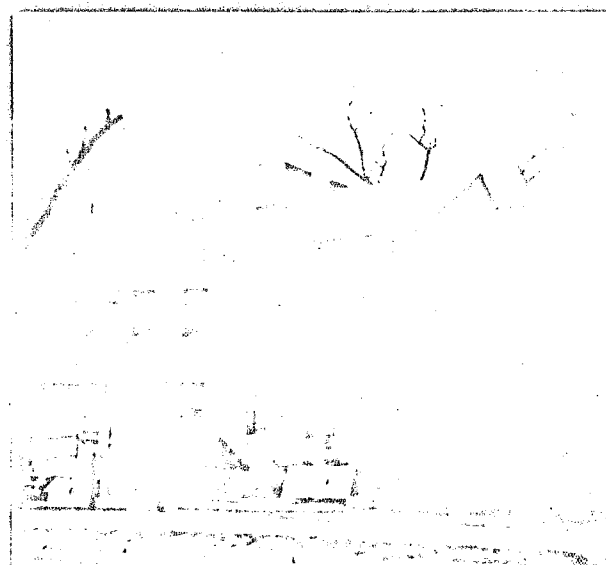
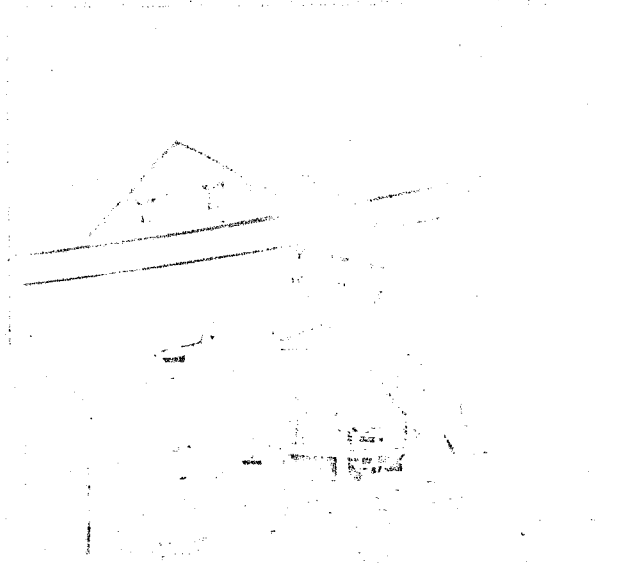
815 Main Street



811-809 Main Street

821-819 Main Street

Constructed in two parts. Believed to be of early 19th century construction. The oldest house in Laurel.



### III.

#### The Mill Workers' Houses

##### A. Background

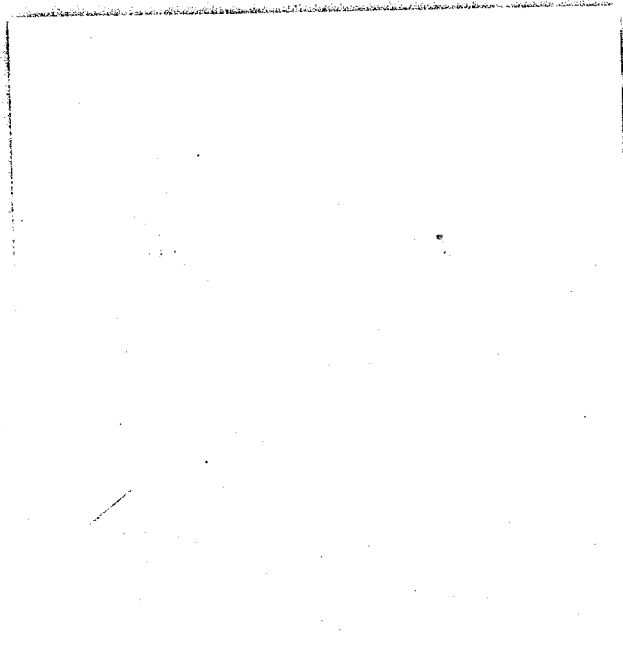
The most prominent reminders today in the City of Laurel of their vanished industry are the mill workers' houses. Of the twelve pre-Civil War structures remaining, eleven are grouped on the west end of Main Street and the other one is on Ninth Street (Yellow Row).

During the early years of Nicholas Snowden's grist mill there were apparently a few log cabins nearby, being used as living quarters for workers. <sup>(1)</sup> The oldest of the houses standing today is located at 819-821 Main Street, across from the site of the latter-day cotton mill. Some popular <sup>(2)</sup> accounts claim that it was built as early as 1802. If the 1811 date attributed to the grist mill is correct, it highly unlikely that any structure of this size and cost would have been built on this site before the mill operation was expanded. The earliest reference to what is presumed to be this structure is the William Johnson agreement with Nicholas Snowden in 1830, <sup>(3)</sup> which provided \$1,200 fire insurance coverage for the house.

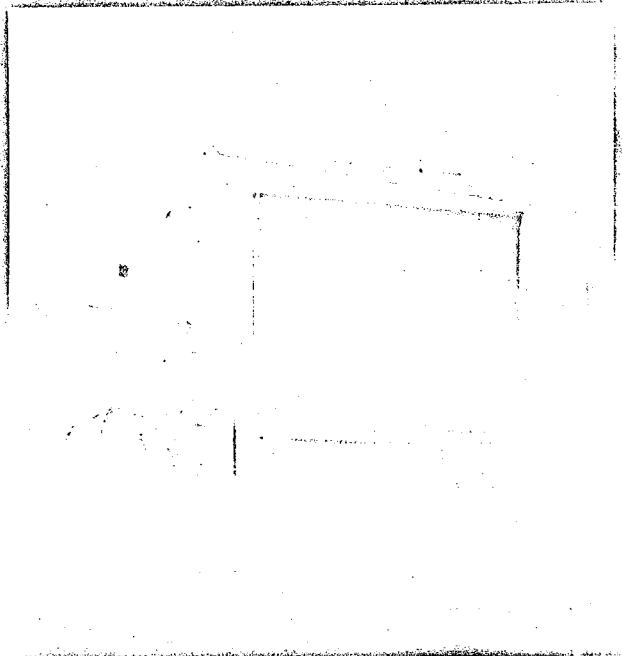
The remainder of the mill houses were most likely constructed in the period 1835-1845 after the incorporation of the Patuxent Company and its expansion of the business. A record exists as to the origin of one of these houses, however. On July 20, 1843, Horace Capron agreed that James S. Gary <sup>(4)</sup> should construct a house on his land at what is now <sup>707</sup> 207 Main Street. <sup>(5)</sup> In turn, Gary was given a 99-year lease on the property. The reasons for this arrangement are unknown.

The greatest mystery surrounding the mill houses is their number. Twelve survive today. On the Martinet Map of 1861 there are 23 structures which could have fallen in this category. A writer in 1845 indicated that there

*Mrs. St. Clair's house*

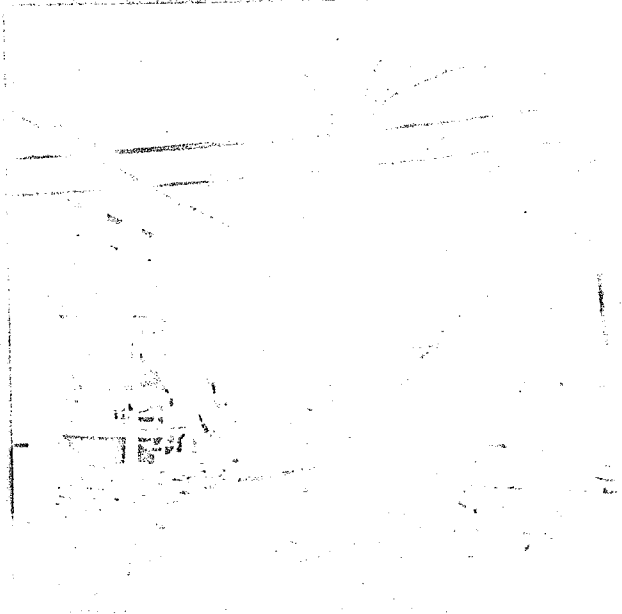


900 Main Street

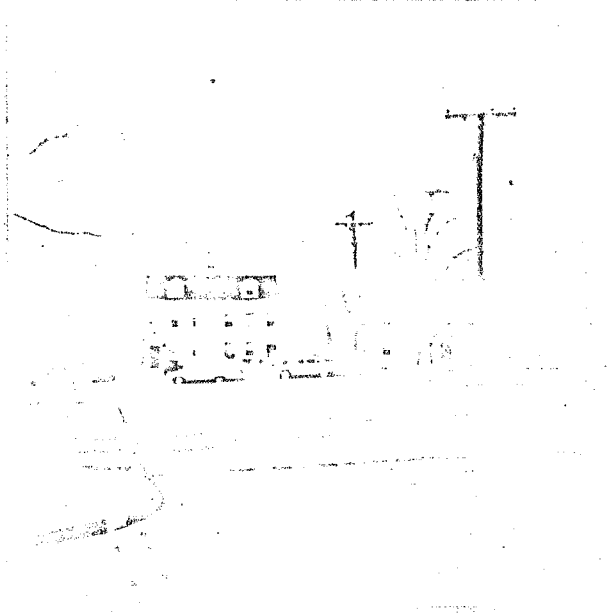


House on Ninth Street - no number.  
Located behind Pallotti High School.

Looking east on Main Street from  
Ninth Street. The Laurel Mill site  
is behind the photographer.



View North on Church Street  
toward Main Street.



were 150 blocks of two story stone houses, each competent for four families. This number seems to be an exaggeration on the part of the reporter. Laurel Illustrated agrees with this position. Their estimate (1894) of the population would place the number of structures closer to the 23 indicated by the map.  
(7)

These houses are all privately owned today and some of them have been converted to single family dwellings.

#### B. Architecture

Of the twelve pre-Civil War houses standing today only one is frame (703 Main Street). Three are brick, two stucco, and the remainder are of native stone construction. The most interesting factor is that no two of them are identical, which leads to a conclusion that they were built over a protracted period time as funds were available or the work force increased. The most identical of the group are those at 704-712 Main Street. These three blocks are stone and of the same over-all dimensions, however there are two basic variations. Number 704-706 has windows on the third floor in the gable ends, which are not repeated in the other two blocks. The structure at 712-714 has three interior chimneys rather than the large brick chimneys protruding from the end walls, as is the case of the other two.

Two of the houses fall in a category by themselves. Number 707 Main Street, built by James Gary, is a tall, 2½ story stone structure with four small half-windows under the eaves, both front and back. This feature is seen in Greek Revival structures in upper New York State and in the Midwest, but is rare in Prince George's County, Maryland. The other unusual structure, 819-821 Main Street, is the oldest. Of brick on a stone foundation, it was the only one to be built in two parts at separate times. Two large square chimneys are

This is the "1802 house" -17-

located in the center of the building.

Some of the mill houses have had modern dormer windows added and one (815 Main Street) has steel window frames of modern design. Number ~~908~~<sup>908</sup> Main Street, constructed of brick, is the only full three-story structure in the group.

These mill houses are representative of the plain dwelling built by and for the working class in the first half of the 19th century by competent carpenters and stonemasons. They are unusual, however, because they were designed to provide living space for four families each. In an area such as Laurel, this would be indicative of the fact that they were built as company housing.



SNOWDEN-CAPRON HOUSE

The smokehouse (R) may be seen in the above photo immediately to the right of the house.

Snowden-Capron House prior to destruction in 1957. The modern frame wing at left was added after 1917 when it was used as a convent.



## IV.

### Snowden-Capron House

#### A. Background

The Snowden-Capron House was located on Church (Eighth) Street across from St. Mary of the Mills Roman Catholic Church. Facing north toward the river, it commanded a view of the mill site and the surrounding Patuxent Valley.

Although his home was located several miles to the southeast at "Montpelier", Nicholas Snowden was supposed to have built this house after his mill operation was launched in 1811. Most likely this house was erected as a convenient place to stay when the mill business demanded a large portion of the owner's time. After Nicholas Snowden's death in 1831 it was to be the residence of the Caprons. When Capron left Laurel Factory it became the property of the mill company and in successive years it was the residence of the mill superintendent.

In 1917 St. Mary's purchased the property for school use and it served as a convent until it was destroyed in 1957 to make way for the new Pallotti High School and Convent. The only reminder of this landmark of early Laurel Factory is the smokehouse, a substantial stone structure which was left standing in the garden beside the school.

#### B. Architecture

The Snowden-Capron House was a T-shape structure of stone and frame construction. On the surface it would appear that the top of the "T", which was of stone construction, would have been the original part of the house. The base of the "T", built of wood, extended to the north toward the river. It may be that Nicholas Snowden built the original section, with Capron adding the frame section.

In many ways, however, the structure could be regarded as a single entity. The bracketing on the gable end of the stone house, the flat-arch windows on

the third level and the fancy brickwork of the chimneys tend to date the house after 1831, the date of Snowden's death. On the other hand, it is possible that the stone section could have been "modernized" when the frame portion was added.

The total structure could be dated from the 1840's. In general appearance it is very similar to some of the country villas portrayed (minus the "ginger-bread"<sup>(4)</sup>) in the architectural style book of A. J. Downing, published in 1850. The Snowden-Capron House was a significant structure in that it portrayed the development of domestic architecture from the Georgian-Federal, which is so predominant in Maryland, into the <sup>Eclectic</sup> eclectic phase of the Revival period. Since the other major structures of Laurel Factory were either industrial or ecclesiastical related, this house was the one transitional link with the many post-Civil War Victorian houses in Laurel today.



ASSEMBLY HALL

Photo taken in 1912 by Robert  
Sadler.

V.

Assembly Hall

"Assembly Rooms" was the "name" of the building: old-timers still living who knew the structure invariably refer to it by that title. JCB

1. Background

The Assembly Hall or "Assembly Rooms," as it is labeled on Simon Martinet's Map of Prince George's County, was located on the corner of Assembly and Eighth (Church) Streets. This facility was constructed by the Patuxent Company in 1840 as a part of their paternalistic approach to the employees.

The hall served as a social center for the town until the Academy of Music was built in 1879. After that it shared the honors. The early worship services and the organizational meeting of St. Philip's Parish were held there. Perhaps the highlight of the structure's existence came when President Zachary Taylor, the hero of the Mexican War, came to visit Laurel Factory in 1849 as the guest of its first citizen, Col. Horace Capron. After being entertained in the Capron home, General Taylor was greeted by the townspeople at the Assembly Hall where he shook hands with all in attendance.

Competing facilities and hard times for the mill caused the Assembly Hall to be abandoned. The Sadler photograph indicates its neglect. Under a headline entitled "St. Mildred's Academy Expanding"; the Laurel Leader in 1919 stated

The building known as the "assembly rooms" will be torn down, and on its site and the balance of the lot to Main Street will be erected a new building for class rooms, etc." (6)

The exact date of destruction is unknown, however the Laurel Leader four years later reported the official opening of St. Mildred's Hall.

The only contemporary reminder of this landmark is block-long Assembly Street between Eighth (Church) and Ninth (Yellow Row) Streets.

B. Architectural Comment

The only record of the appearance of the Assembly Hall is the Sadler photograph taken in 1912. A two-story structure approximately 20'x46' in dimension, it was constructed of brick resting on a stone rubble foundation. This combination of materials was used in some of the mill workers' houses. The slope of the terrain to the north and west, and the presence of two windows in the foundation of the south wall indicate that a basement existed under at least a portion of the building.

*A family lived here, as was also true at Odd Fellows Hall, Frame Methodist Church, and Academy of Music.*

The twin single front doors provided a practical solution for a functional building. One door led directly onto the main floor, while the other provided access to a stairway to the hall on the second floor. By providing a second floor, rather than a gallery or balconies, two separate events could be held concurrently. The exterior door to the stairway saved valuable floor space.

*here, as was also true at Odd Fellows Hall, Frame Methodist Church, and Academy of Music.*

In appearance the structure evidences the Gothic Revival influence. Standard 12-pane windows appear on the first level while those on the second floor are heightened by a Gothic lancet arch. Gauged brick is used over the windows on both floors. No keystones are present and the sills, judging from their thinness, are of wood rather than stone.

An unusual feature of the facade is the use of a built-up stepped gable in the style of the "Stone Church". (This feature is also repeated on the west end.) In addition there is a rectangular recessed panel in the brickwork at top center. The severity of this treatment, as well as that of the austere framing of the doors with a plain, broad architrave, suggests the Greek influence. The proportions of the facade, it being tall and narrow, are not in the Greek tradition.

*Five insurance premiums were undoubtedly the reason for apartments in public buildings.*

There is, in the absence of company records, no indication that an architect was employed. It is conjectured that there were master mechanics on the payroll who were capable of designing and building this simple structure.



METHODIST MEETING HOUSE  
Photographed September 16, 1906 by  
Robert Sadler.

## VI.

### Methodist Meeting House

#### A. Background

The first religious group to organize in Laurel Factory were the Methodists, whose congregation dates from 1840. Early meetings were held on the second floor of one of the mill houses on the corner of Yellow Row (Ninth Street) and Main Street. (1)

Henry Snowden, one of Nicholas Snowden's younger children, secured from the Patuxent Company a grant of land, some stone and \$300 for construction of the Methodist Meeting House in 1842. (2) Over the years this structure was known as the "Old Stone Church".

By the time Sadler took his photograph of the church on September 16, 1906 it had been abandoned. In more recent times it was used by a blacksmith and by the mid-1940's only portions of the walls were standing. It was then that this relic of the past was bulldozed, along with its small cemetery, (3) for the construction of an apartment.

#### B. Architectural Comment

This quaint little structure was approximately 20' x 30' in size. The reddish-brown stone came from the same local quarry which furnished the material for the mill properties and the other early structures of the town. The plain, simple appearance of the Methodist Meeting House has a certain professional architectural touch through the use of what appear to be limestone quoins and gauged limestone lintels with keystones over the windows.

The facade, with its stepped gable is similar to the treatment applied in the Assembly Hall, built two years earlier. The opposite end was identical, similar to the Assembly Hall as well. A variation occurs in the church, in that the front wall is cantilevered out about eight inches at the eave level, giving an overhang which is pleasing

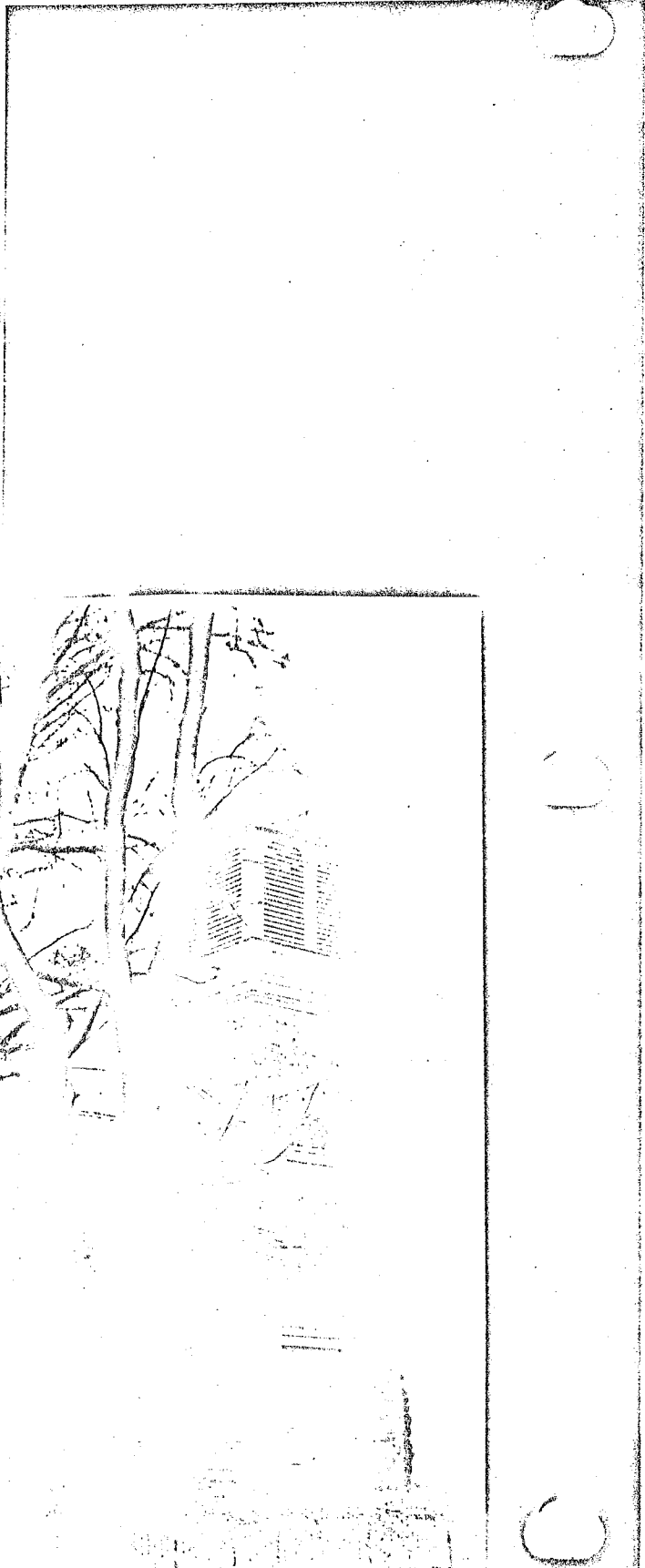
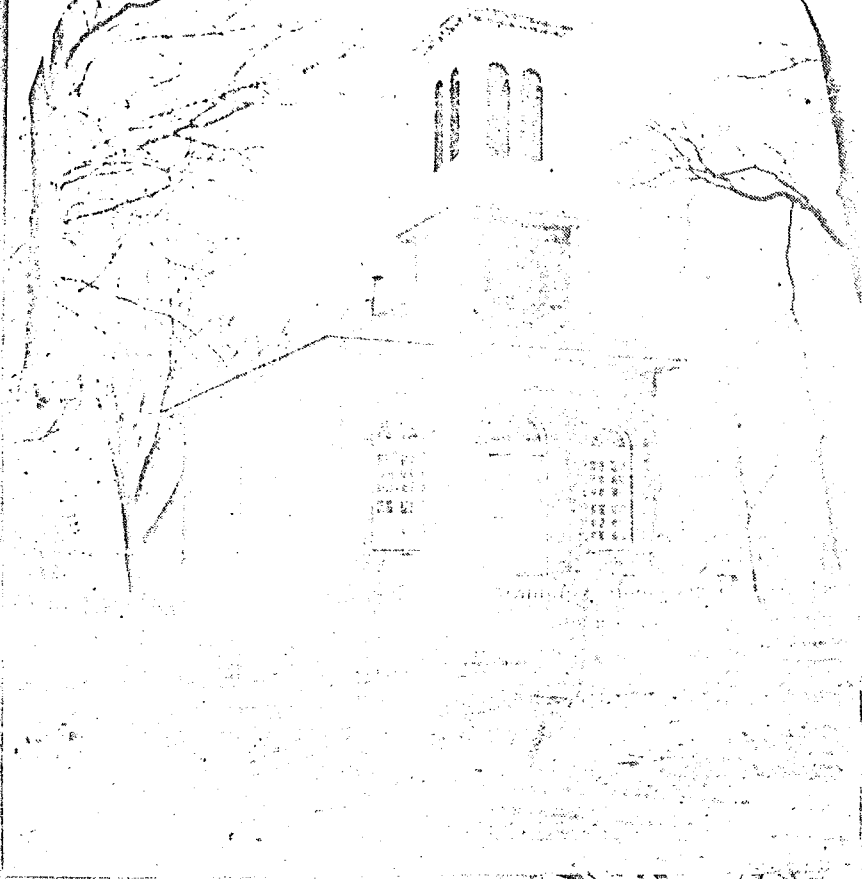
touch. Plain wood trim appears on the eaves and at the top of the facade.

It is evident from the photograph that twin front doors for side aisles in the church were the original design. At some later date the front window was converted into a center door and the doors were made into windows.

The use of quoins suggests the classical revival in architecture. There is no evidence of a professional architect being employed and again it must be suggested that mill personnel and an experienced stonemason were responsible for this little gem.

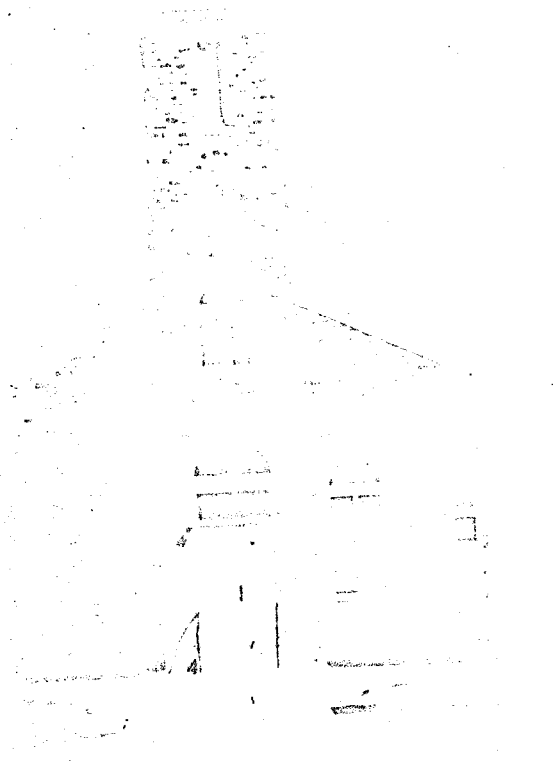
ST. MARY OF THE MILLS - 1843

This photograph of the original church is in the possession of the Rector.



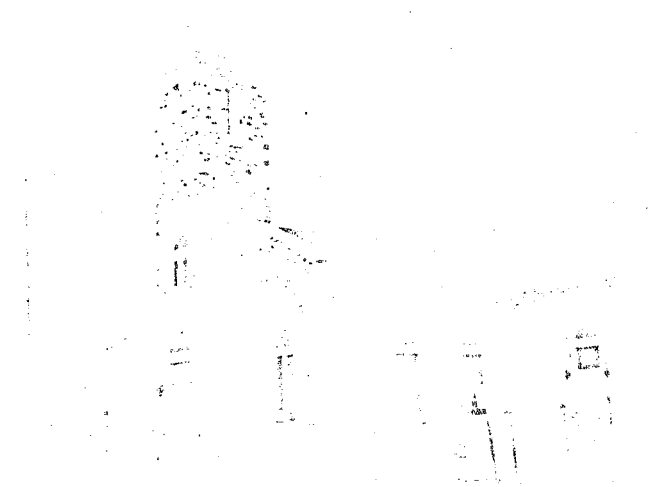

ST. MARY OF THE MILLS - 1890

Robert Sadler photograph of September 16, 1906, showing the front addition.



ST. MARY OF THE MILLS

The 1959 modifications - new church and  
stone belfry.



## VII.

### St. Mary of the Mills Roman Catholic Church

#### A. The Beginnings

The story of the Roman Catholic Church in Laurel Factory, like everything else in the town's early history, is entwined with the Snowden family. Upon the death of Nicholas Snoden in 1831, his main property, "Montpelier", was to become the home of one of his daughters, Juliana Marie. Juliana was married to Theodore Jenkins, M.D. (1) Priests from Georgetown College, the Alma Mater of Dr. Jenkins, celebrated Mass at "Montpelier" or in the village during the 1830's. The following grew as the mill expanded. According to tradition Dr. Jenkins learned from two Catholic travellers who had stopped at his home for food that they were stonemasons on their way to Richmond in search of work, He promptly put them to work on the walls of the church. Construction took place in 1842 and the first Mass was celebrated in the new structure, often referred to as "Jenkin's Chapel", by the Rev. James Ryder, S.J., President of Georgetown College. (2) St. Mary of the Mills continued as a Jesuit mission until 1866 when the first diocesan priest was appointed. Not until about 1888 did they have their first resident pastor. (3)

Sixty-nine acres of land, including the chapel site, were deeded to Georgetown College by the Jenkins and Eliza Snowden, Juliana's younger sister. Eliza became a convert to Catholicism soon after Juliana, and later became a nun in 1847. Shortly before the Jesuits gave up St. Mary of the Mills as a mission, they sold all of the property but the three-acre churchyard. This land extended eastward toward the Baltimore-Washington Turnpike. (4)

An addition to the front of the church was made in 1890. (5) The present structural modifications were accomplished in 1959. (6)

## B. Architecture

There is no record of St. Mary's having been designed by an architect, although in appearance, materials and workmanship it was the outstanding structure of the pre-Civil War period in Laurel Factory.

The original 1842 church was approximately 54' long and 32'6" wide. There were three windows on each side and two on the front wall. These, along with the opening for the front door, had stilted arches. There were no windows in the east wall behind the altar.

In general the original church appeared to be a modified Georgian structure. This modification was achieved primarily by omitting the second and third stage and steeple on the tower. The one feature of the building which reflected the revival period was the treatment of the cornices. Two-by-fours, about 15" in length are used on a plain 18" eave. They are placed about 18" apart. This is in major contrast to the square block dentils used on most Georgian structures. From the photograph of the church it appears that the treatment was used on the tower cornices.

The original windows were divided by mullions into four sections of six panes each, with a fan light above the mass. On the left front window eight panes were paneled over where the stairs to the gallery were located. The failure to "balance off" this feature in the right front window is perhaps a clue that an architect was not involved. Symmetry would normally be considered by a professional.

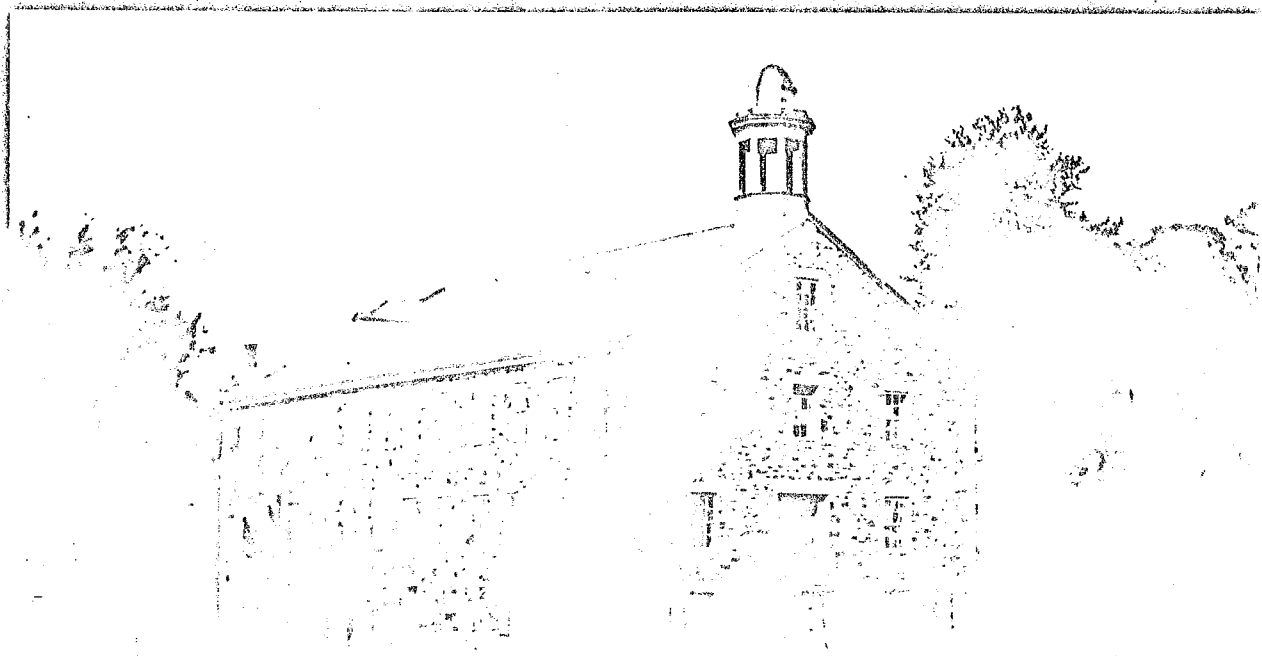
Unfortunately, the only portion of the original church remaining today is about half (27') of the side walls. The rear portion of the 1842 structure (the east wall behind the altar and about 27' of side walls) was removed when the new church was built in 1959. The front of the church represents the 12' extension added in 1890. Two features help to determine this extension.

Although a good effort was made to match the stone, and the masonry work is superior, there is a predominance of darker or <sup>"niggerhead marble"</sup> "black" stones in the walls' including the tower. The most tell-tale item can be found in the eaves on the south wall. The mitre joints on the three boards used to box in the eaves still remain at the point where the old front wall was located. On the north wall new boards were used, thus removing this distinguishing mark.

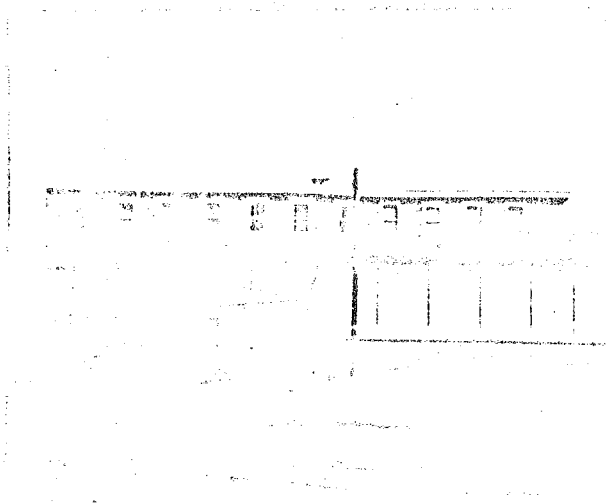
When the 1959 church was built on the cruciform plan, the old building was incorporated as one of the transepts. The outward appearance was maintained through the use of the same stone and in the treatment of the windows and cornices. The frame portion of the 1890 tower which housed the bell was removed and replaced with stone to the level of the previous elevation. Although accomplished in a tasteful manner, the solid stone mass gives the appearance that the tower is too tall for the size of the total structure. The 1890 false-front facade with its two Gothic -appearing pinnacles was <sup>later</sup> cut down to the roofline ~~in 1959~~ also.

In the 1842 church the tower was a part of the main structure, projecting about 18' from the front wall. A round window, later replaced by an arched one, appeared above the front door in the face of the tower. The use of a hipped roof gave the tower a more pleasing effect than would have been accomplished if it had risen from the gable end.

Although most of the original church is gone, its modern successor, in appearance and architectural taste, is a worthy substitution.

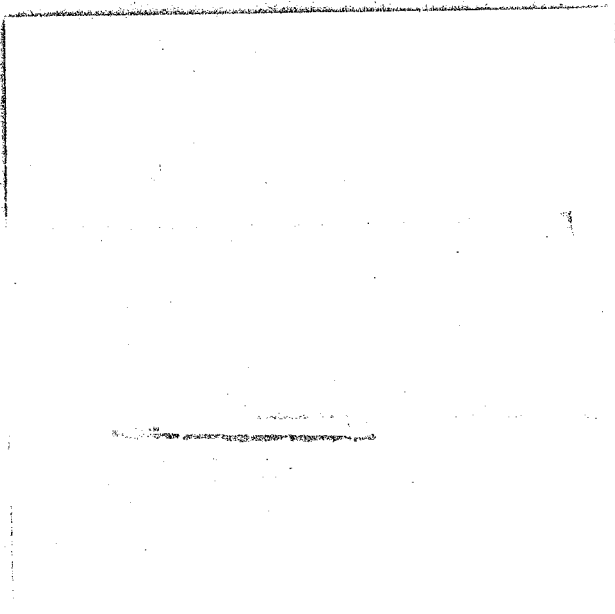


Avondale Mill  
Photograph taken by Robert Sadler.  
August 11, 1907

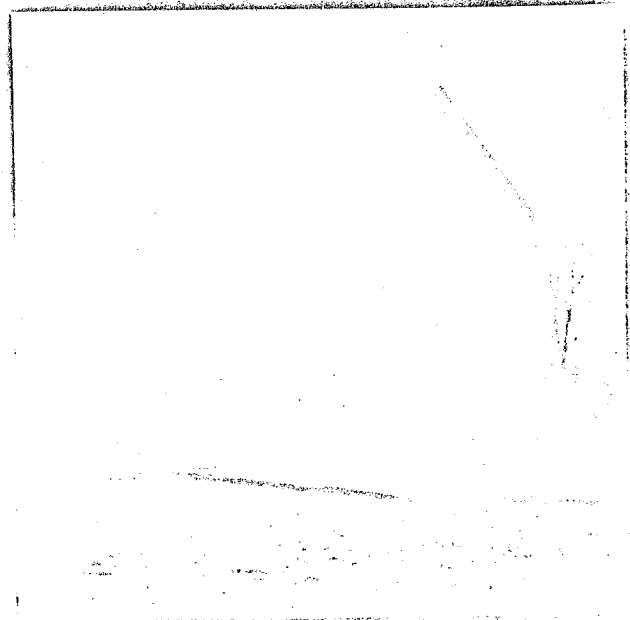


Avondale Mill  
From the west. The Patuxent River is to the left.

Avondale Mill  
View from east



Avondale Mill  
The river side



## VIII.

### Avondale Mill

#### A. Background

The Avondale Mill is situated on the Patuxent River at the end of Avondale Street. It was built in 1844-45 as a cotton cloth mill, having 1,500 spindles. <sup>(1)</sup> About ten years later it was converted into a grist mill and

<sup>(2)</sup> in 1861 it was under the proprietorship of George Wheeler. During the late 1800's through the turn of the century it was owned and operated by B.F. Crabbs. <sup>(3)</sup> *(Mrs. Crabbs eloped with the Rev. Mr. Downs, Methodist clergyman, and*

Presently the mill is owned by the City of Laurel and is used as a storage area for the Department of Public Works. In addition it serves as a recreation center and as headquarters for the Recreation Department. The metal shed to the west and the ground floor of the mill is utilized by Public Works and the metal shed on the south front and the first floor of the mill are used by the Recreation Department. Although the roof is secure, the second floor windows are gone, leaving that area open to birds and the destructive elements. They are taking their toll. *thereafter lived in wash.)*

#### B. Architectural Comment

With the exception of the metal shed additions to the south and west, and the absence of its cupola, the Avondale Mill appears today much as it did when it was constructed. It is situated on a North-South axis about 75' from the Patuxent River.

The floor dimensions are 95' x 46'9". It is three story structure with loft and is built of native stone with granite lintels and irregular granite quoins. All of the windows are of equal size, 3'4" x 6'. On the long axis of the building there are eleven windows on each floor on both sides. The floors are

supported by  $10\frac{1}{2}' \times 14\frac{1}{2}'$  beams (10), spaced at varying widths (average equals 6'8"). The walls are 32", gauged down to 24" on the top floor. Lolly columns  $8\frac{1}{2}'$  square are used down the center of the ground floor level for support. Tapered columns 8" at the base are employed on the main (second) floor. They are placed to the right of center to facilitate movement of material and machinery through the double doors of the main entrance. There are no supports on the top floor.

On the river side the north wall on the third and loft levels is constructed of brick. It appears to be a part of the original structure and was most likely an economy measure.

The main floor had offices to the left of the large double-doored main entrance. To the right an enclosed stairway, 5 feet wide, led to the levels above and below. A narrow open stair in the northwest corner of the top floor gives access to the loft. The six-sided cupola, Georgian in appearance, was removed sometime after 1907 as were the two chimneys and the dormer window, (4)  
The mill dam, a miniature compared with the one upriver, was located about opposite St. Philip's Church. The presence of the millrace is evidenced today by Race Street, which extends north toward the river from Main Street.

The location of the mill wheel is difficult to determine. It could have been located on the northwest corner of the building. There is also the possibility that it could have been situated inside the mill on the lower level. The ground floor is concrete of recent vintage, so no evidence is visible. At the center of the outside north wall there is a covered well about 4'x5' holding water, which seems to originate from a trough under the foundations. Further conversations with early residents and archeological explorations can only solve this mystery.

It is very unlikely that the Avondale Mill was designed by an architect. As in the case of the Laurel Mill, technology determined where the walls

should be built and the load-bearing strenght of the floors. The mill owner may very well have served as his own architect.

As a total package the materials and workmanship were good and the total effort represents a considerable expenditure of money.

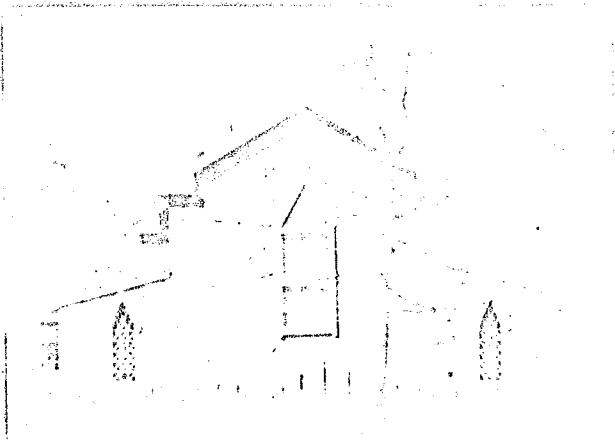
## IX.

### St. Philip's Episcopal Church

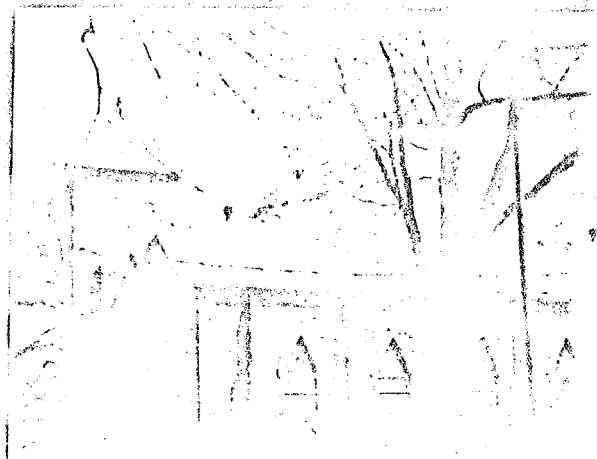
#### A. Organizing a Parish

There is some discrepancy as to the exact date that the work of the Episcopal Church was begun at Laurel Factory. Laurel Illustrated states that the church was founded in 1839 through the efforts of Col. Horace Capron's wife, Louisa Snowden. <sup>(1)</sup> (The Snowden family were Quakers, but she was a convert to her husband's faith.) However, the first parochial report from Laurel Mission, Zion Parish, Prince George's County was not filed until May, 1847 by the Rev. Theodore Barber, Deacon. <sup>(2)</sup> Barber's official letter of appointment as a diocesan missionary had been signed on July 2, 1846 by the Right Reverend William Rollinson Whittingham, fourth Bishop of Maryland. <sup>(3)</sup> Services were commenced in Laurel Factory that same month. In this instance the official church records must prevail over the information in the city directory.

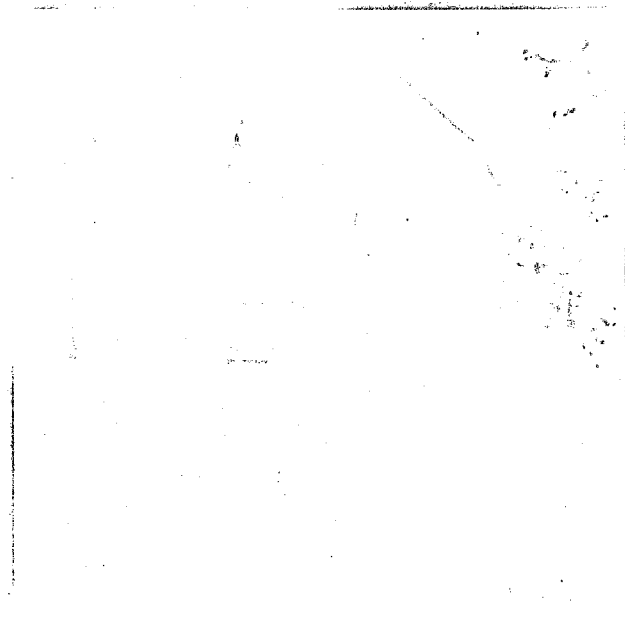
In May, 1847, ten persons including Col. Horace Capron and his brother, John M. Capron, petitioned the Convention of the Diocese of Maryland for permission to form a new parish under the name of St. Philip's Parish. The boundaries of this new unit would include territory taken from two existing parishes; Zion Parish, Prince George's County and Queen Caroline Parish, Anne Arundel County. <sup>(4)</sup> The petition was granted and on Easter Monday, April 24, 1848, the members of the congregation met in the Public Hall (Assembly Hall) to organize their new parish by electing a Vestry. The Vestry then proceeded to select a Register(sic), Church Wardens and a Rector. Col. Horace Capron was designated as Lay Delegate to the diocesan convention in 1848 which <sup>(5)</sup> officially recognized the new St. Philip's Parish.



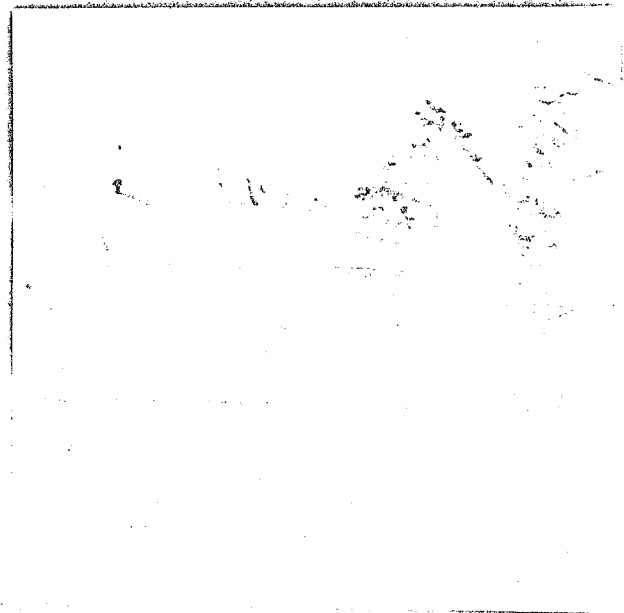
The altar end, showing appended sacristy rooms.



Looking east



Buttress and window detail.



From the east, showing the original church designed by John Alexander.

B.. Building the Church

The Rev. Theodore Barber, in his first report to Bishop Whittingham in 1847, stressed the need for a church building. Although his tiny congregation had "contributed most freely and cheerfully" according to their means, it was necessary to look to friends in Baltimore for help which did materialize. (6) By the following year the number of church members had doubled to a total of eight and the Sunday School had remained stable at sixty scholars. (7) The "simple, unadorned structure" (8) which was "gratuitously and appropriately designed by a faithful son of the Church" was completed in May. The Rector stated that only a few hundred dollars of the debt remained, but yet he re-emphasized the need for further financial aid from friends (9) within the diocese.

St. Philips Church was consecrated on St. Matthew's Day, September 21, 1848 by Bishop Whittingham. (10) The structure was described as being "small and plain, but church like!"

"... of stone, found in the vicinity, in the early English style, and consists of a nave, chancel, a vestry room on either side of the chancel, and a tower at the west end of the nave, intended to be hereafter finished with a spire. The plan was kindly furnished by J. H. Alexander, Esq. of Baltimore, and, in the opinion of those well qualified to judge, reflects credit upon his taste and judgment. It was a source of regret to many, that the strict necessity to consult economy had constrained the accomplished designer to omit some of the features of the early English style, but all were agreed in awarding to him the praise of having performed the difficult task of erecting an ecclesiastical looking building, capable of accommodating from two hundred to two hundred and fifty persons at a less cost than the unmeaning structures so often found in country parishes in Maryland. The features of the interior which called forth favorable comment, were the open roof, of simple but very striking design and the position of the altar in its place of due prominence against the East wall. It is intended that the windows shall ultimately be filled with stained glass, which will add richness to the internal effect." (11)

The church lot, which was 120 feet deep and had a 100 foot frontage on the south side of Main Street, was deeded to the Vestry on the consecration

day (September 21, 1848) by the Caprons for a consideration of five dollars. (12)

The bell was from old St. Paul's Church, Baltimore, whose well-to-do parishioners were also a likely source of contributions to the construction fund. (13)

The church was enlarged in 1892 (14) and in 1927 a Parish Hall was constructed adjoining the west side of the edifice. (15)

### C. Architectural Comment

St. Philip's Church is the only structure for which there is a record of its having been designed by a person of professional training. John Henry Alexander was a graduate of St. John's College, Annapolis, and received professional training in Baltimore. Early in his career he was Professor of Engineering in the University of Pennsylvania. (16) At the time he designed St. Philip's, Alexander was listed as an engineer located at 258 Lexington Street, Baltimore. (17)

There are several ways in which John Alexander could have been made aware of the needs for a church in Laurel Factory. He had written a book on iron mines in Maryland, which would have put him in touch with the Snowdens whose foundry on Birmingham Manor was mentioned earlier. (18) As a prominent layman of St. Luke's Church, Baltimore, and a leader in the Diocese of Maryland as well, a request for aid to the struggling congregation could have come through official channels. (19) John Alexander also spent his early years as a right-of-way engineer in railroading. Although he did not work for the Baltimore and Ohio, his professional interest may have caused him to inspect the route through Laurel Factory to Washington, built in 1834-35. Finally, Alexander was a college classmate of the Rev. William Pinkney who was Rector of Zion Parish, Beltsville, and whose jurisdiction included Laurel Factory prior to the establishment of the new parish. (20) Any or all of these reasons could have made him cognizant of the struggling congregation and its needs.

11

In selecting the Gothic style of an English country church, John Alexander produced what is perhaps the first of its kind in Prince George's County. By 1840 Baltimore as well as the rest of the country had seized upon the Gothic as an appropriate style for a Christian church. (21) Robert Carey Long, Jr. was the first major Baltimore architect to utilize the Gothic. (His famous architect father, Robert Carey Long, Sr. had assisted Maxmilien Godefroy in his design of St. Mary's College Chapel (1806), the first neo-Gothic ecclesiastical structure in the United States.) The eminent Benjamin Henry Latrobe had submitted two designs for the new Roman Catholic Cathedral in Baltimore, America's first, but Archbishop John Carroll had rejected the Gothic for the classical style. (22) Young Long's first Gothic work was St. Alphonsus Catholic Church (1842) on Saratoga Street and Park Avenue. In 1844 he designed the Franklin Street Presbyterian Church which was dedicated in 1847. Long also designed the Mount Calvary Episcopal Church (1845) at Madison Avenue and Eutaw Street, and the gateway of Greenmount Cemetery (1847) (23) These new, contemporary structures, as well as James Renwick's Smithsonian Institution in Washington most likely provided the inspiration for Alexander, Likewise there may very well have been the desire to adopt a style and appearance different from the existing Methodist and Roman Catholic edifices in Laurel Factory.

It should be noted that the rectangular hall with an entrance vestibule at one end supporting a staged tower which were typical of the Georgian church, were easily "gothicized". Thw walls could be continued above the eaves and terminated with crenellations, the arched windows and doors pointed, and the square tower could also be capped with crenellations. (24) To a certain extent this is somewhat the approach made by Alexander in his design of St. Philip's, yet he did institute some variations. It must be remembered that lack of funds caused some modifications of his design. In the absence of his drawings, these are

are open to conjecture.

The main body of the original St. Philip's was 52'6" long by 33'8" wide. A tower was on the front and if the 1892 extension duplicated the earlier version, it was almost square, being 9'6" x 10'. On the side walls were four buttresses each, 2' square, which delineated the three bays of the nave. Alexander's major variation on the Georgian rectangular appearance was the addition of two vestry rooms, one on either side of the chancel. In the normal rectangular church these rooms would be entirely contained within the side walls, thus narrowing the chancel. In order to provide more space in that area, Alexander pushed the rooms out, thus projecting them approximately 5' on either side of the building. This was a standard practice in early English churches. From the street they could pass as small transepts or apsidal chapels which were common to the Gothic tradition.

The most unusual feature of Alexander's plan was the treatment given the windows of the bays. They are 8' high by 4'3½" wide. Under normal circumstances proportions would dictate two lancet windows side-by-side with a limestone or wooden mullion dividing them. In some instances a small trefoil opening might be set in the space between the two arches, thus forming a large Gothic arched window of the three components. Since money was a consideration and the reddish-brown stone used consisted mainly of rubble which wasn't conducive to fine masonry work, another approach to the problem was taken. The window apertures in the walls are 12' in height, extending to the interior floor level. The four foot space from the bottom of the window to the floor holds a painted wood panel. Thus, on the outside elevation of a 10' bay, there is a window/panel penetration 12' x 4'3½" which is in better proportion. The use of the plain panel below the window in Gothic architecture is very rare. Usually such treatment would be reserved for situations in which an existing door might be converted to a window.

6

The panel would normally have arches and other designs carved on it.

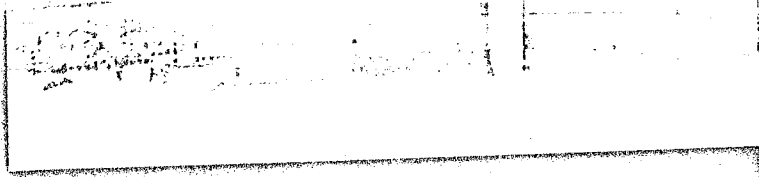
The quality of the stone used also caused another modification in the Gothic design. The arches of the window openings are not curved, but are perfectly straight, terminating at a point. This is readily observed from the inside of the church. To gain the Gothic arch effect, two techniques were used. The inside edge of the wooden frame holding the stained glass was curved slightly. On the exterior,  $6\frac{1}{2}$ " wide trim bearing a 2" concave routing in the center has been placed above the arches. The slight curve of this trim also contributes to the Gothic arch effect.

The tower, if identical to the original, is somewhat out of proportion both in floor dimensions and height. On both counts it is too small. The roof of the tower seems to be somewhat of an afterthought. To harmonize with the structure, it should either be lower or higher, more spire-like in appearance.

The interior of St. Philip's is completely open to the roof. The main roof beams are supported by a modified hammer-beam arrangement which employs tie-rods to keep the walls from bulging.

The 1892 addition to the back of the nave gave two additional bays (22') and a new tower. It is curious that at St. Philip's, as in the expansion of St. Mary's, the addition involved the rebuilding of the tower. Certainly it would have been cheaper to expand in the opposite direction. The only logical explanation is that the parishioners would have objected to the removal of the graves immediately behind the church for purposes of construction.

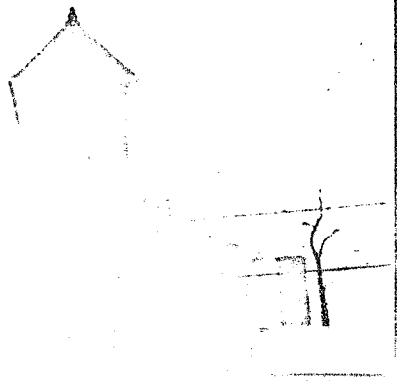
St. Mary's tower was rebuilt presumably to accommodate the 1846 Mercely mill bell.



ST. PHILIP'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Photographed May 24, 1906 by Robert Sadler.

*The earliest known photograph*



## X.

### Epilogue

In considering the architecture of the pre-Civil War period in Laurel, Maryland, it has been ascertained that the bulk of the town's building growth was a result of the mill activity begun by Nicholas Snowden. Local materials were used in all instances, and the structures, with the exception of the Snowden-Capron House, were strictly functional in nature. Since most of the townspeople were employed by the mills in the early years, marginal incomes did not provide the means to build private dwelling houses.

Unfortunately, a number of these early structures have been destroyed. Lack of interest and the almighty dollar have determined this course, in a sense past experience could provide a lesson for the citizens. Although they have lost many early landmarks, a fine collection of Victorian houses from the post-Civil War era still exist in the town. They also still have, under town ownership, the Avondale Mill. This venerable structure is being neglected. With little effort it could be restored and used for the same recreational purposes for years to come. Otherwise it will fall down, through neglect, in a few years.

In expressing the opinion that Laurel should take greater pride in this architectural heritage, it is not suggested that the town be turned into a museum. They should continue to use and enjoy their fine structures, and they should take steps to guarantee that generations to come will be able to do the same.

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5. High Court of Chancery Records. Liber 154, folio 1011 (1855)
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7. Laurel Illustrated. p. 7
8. Ibid. p. 8
9. Hungerford, Edward Centennial History of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroads 1827-1927. G. P. Putnam's Sons. N. Y.: 1928 Vol. 1, p. 173.
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6. Chancery Plats. Div. 4, #56, folio 20
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22. American Farmer. Ser. 4. Vol. 1, No. 2 (August 1845) p. 36
23. Laurel Illustrated. p. 12.

III.

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6. Laurel Leader. June 20, 1919
7. Ibid. December 7, 1923
8. Interview, John Calder. April 30, 1973.

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2. Ibid. p. 9-10
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4. Ibid. pp. 11, 13
5. Ibid. p. 15
6. Interview, John Calder. April 30, 1973

VIII.

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2. Journal of the Fifty Eighth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Maryland. Printed by Joseph Robinson. Baltimore: 1846. p. 135.
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6. Journal, 1847. pp. 135-6
7. Journal, 1848. p. 85
8. Journal, 1847. p. 136
9. Journal, 1848. p. 85
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11. <sup>Organization</sup>  
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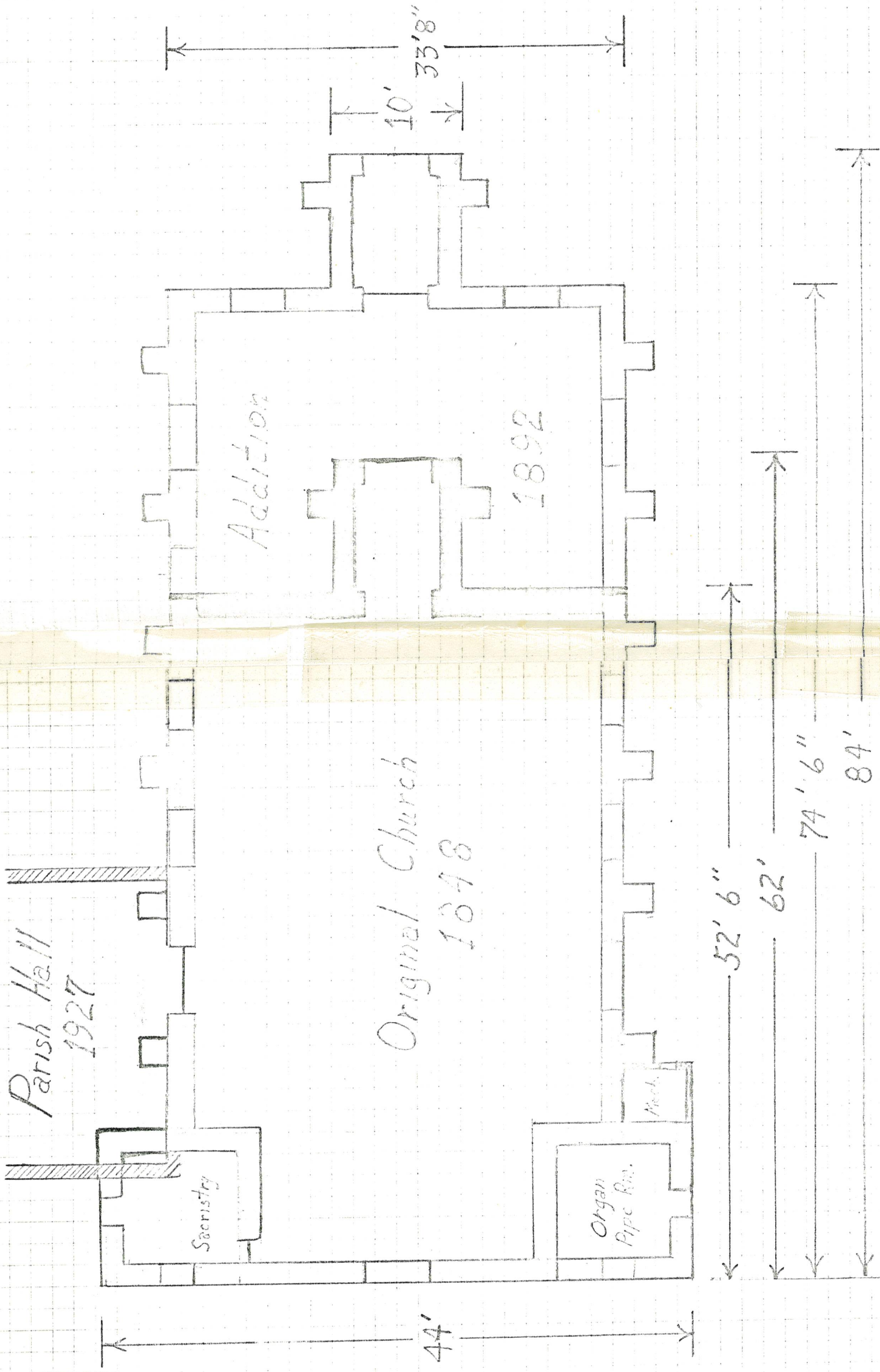
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ST. PHILIP'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
LAUREL, MARYLAND  
APRIL 1973

Scale: 1" = 8'

F. S. DE MARR

Note: These panels were installed in 1964. They cover casement type windows that at one time could be opened to the nave floor. At some unknown date Wainscoting was installed in the nave, the window wells boxed in and the windows, glass as well frames, were painted over on the outside. It was to hide these unattractive and unusable windows that the panels were installed. At the same time jig-sawed wooden crosses measuring about 12 by 12 inches were removed from the peaks of all the outside window frames and the graceful finish of the top of the arches restored.