

# ***Geographical and Historical Overview***

**T**he development of Prince George's County after the end of the Civil War accelerated the many contradictions inherent in the county during the antebellum period. Although the vast majority of both area and population of the county can be characterized as rural, and engaged in growing tobacco during this period, developments such as the growth of manufacturing and suburbanization increasingly changed the nature of life in Prince George's County. Even agriculture was not immune to these changes. Dairy farming, truck farming, and market farming increased in importance in Prince George's County to provide fresh foodstuffs to the nearby and growing urban centers Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. The postbellum period in Prince George's County, then, evidences the continued contradiction between urban and rural, farming and manufacturing, and northern and southern lifeways.

The postbellum period was a time of fundamental change for the county. The year 1865 represents the termination of the Civil War and the year when slavery was abolished, while the end year, 1958, coincides with the "50-year rule" for National Register eligibility. Although the county was left largely intact after the Civil War, unlike counties in the southern states, it was profoundly changed with the emancipation of its enslaved population, much like other counties in the South. In part because of the impact of this change in labor relations, economic and population growth were slow after the Civil War. It was not until the advent of the twentieth century that both the population and economy of the county began to revive, due to such factors as the increased influence of Washington, D.C., and transportation improvements. Railroads, streetcars, and later automobiles opened Prince George's County to successive waves of suburbanization, often at the expense of its agricultural past. This trend continues to this day.

At the opening of the postbellum period, slightly more than 23,000 individuals lived in Prince George's County, with over half of that number being mostly enslaved African-Americans (Table 1). Population declined after the Civil War, with a decrease of slightly more than 2,000 documented in the 1870 census (US Census Bureau [USCB] 2007). However, although the population of white residents rose by nearly 2,000 in that decade, that of African-Americans actually decreased by almost 4,000 (Table 1). Benson et al. (2003:106) indicate that many of the ex-slaves migrated to Washington, D.C., and other urban communities in the South. Thereafter, the population of white residents rose between 10 and 20 percent per decade from 1870 through 1900 and between 30 and 60 percent between 1900 and 1940.

The largest increase during this period, resulting from the World War II-era expansion of the federal government, and better transportation routes, came between 1940 and 1950, when the white population increased at a rate of almost 140 percent. The rate of increase of African-Americans during this same period provides a stark contrast to the figures presented above. Although the population of African-Americans in Prince George's County rose between 1870 and 1880 by about 25 percent, it once again declined between 1880 and 1890, not to equal the 1880 total again until 1930 (Table 1). Thereafter, increases were generally between 15 and 35 percent. Viewed in another way, in 1860, African-Americans comprised 61.5 percent of the population within the county. By 1950, at the end of our period, this figure declined to just 11.7 percent (Figure 1). The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of Prince George's County.

## **Geographical Overview**

Prince George's County lies in the Mid-Atlantic Region and is located in south-central Maryland (Figure 2). It comprises approximately 485 square miles of land situated between Baltimore to the north and Washington, D.C., to the south and west. The Patuxent River and Anne Arundel County form the north and east boundaries of the county, Howard County is to the northwest, while Washington, D.C., the Potomac River, and Montgomery County form the western boundary. Charles County borders to the south.

Previously dominated by agricultural pursuits, the expansion of roadways and rail systems that provide easy access to Washington, D.C., and Baltimore has led to the increasing suburbanization of Prince George's County. The west-central portion of the county, ringing Washington, D.C., is dominated by suburbs of the nation's capital. Laurel lies in the northwest corner of the county while Upper Marlboro, the county seat, is in the east-central portion of the county. Bowie lies to the north between Washington, D.C., and the state capital at Annapolis. Agricultural lands are still plentiful in the eastern portion of the county, generally east of the MD 3/US 301 corridor, and southeast of Washington, D.C. In other parts of the county, agricultural fields lie mixed with fallow fields, many of which are being reclaimed by scrub brush and young forests, eventually becoming housing developments.

Aside from a small area along the Montgomery County border, Prince George's County lies within the Atlantic coastal plain. Under the Atlantic coastal plain, crystalline bedrock dips toward the ocean and is covered by a series of similarly dipping layers of much younger, relatively unconsolidated sand, clay, and gravel. Prince George's County is underlain by various formations composed of unconsolidated sediments deposited during the Tertiary period (Vokes and Edwards 1974; Weaver 1968). Soils in the Atlantic coastal plain are formed through weathering of the more recent, unconsolidated sediments. The most important soils for agriculture, and the best soils in the state for the cultivation of tobacco, are those of the Collington, Sassafras, Marr,

**Table 1: Population of Prince George's County by race between 1860 and 1950.**

Census year	White	African-American	Total
1860	9,650	13,677	23,327
1870	11,358	9,780	21,138
1880	13,965	12,486	26,451
1890	14,867	11,210	26,077
1900	17,910	11,985	29,895
1910	24,043	11,493	35,536
1920	31,277	12,056	43,333
1930	46,048	14,023	60,071
1940	73,217	16,224	89,441
1950	171,247	22,652	193,899

Source: USCB (2007).

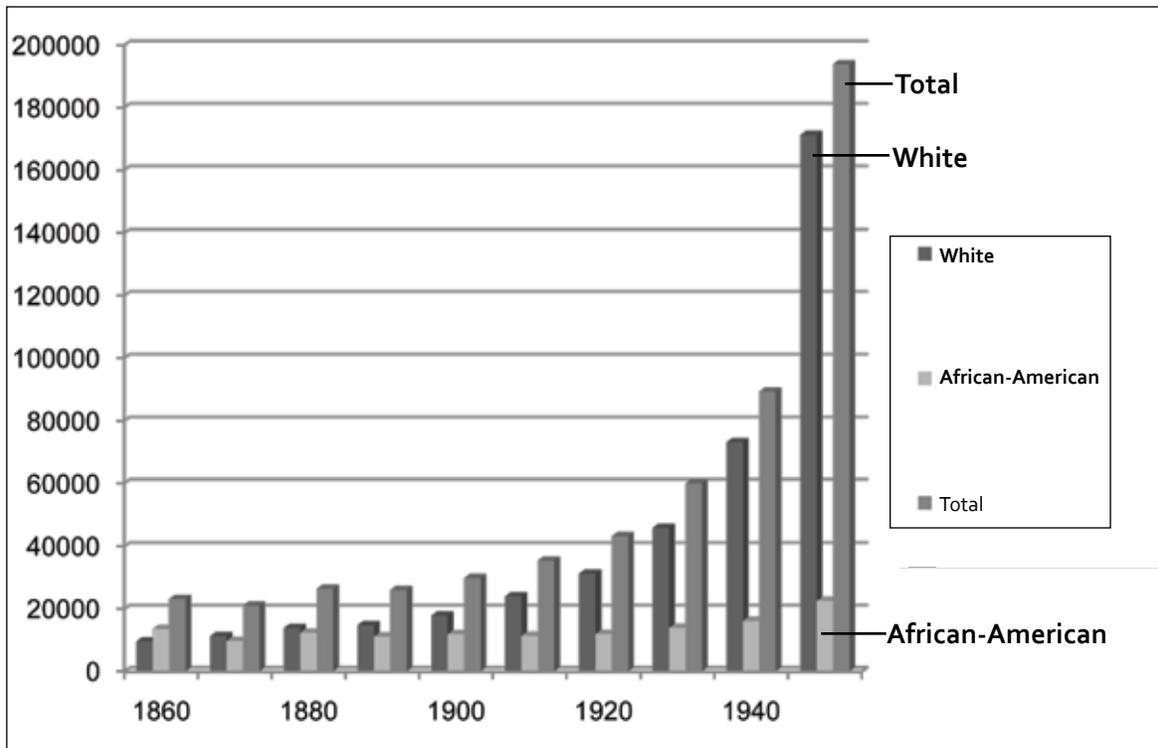


Figure 1: Comparison of Prince George's County by race between 1860 and 1950.

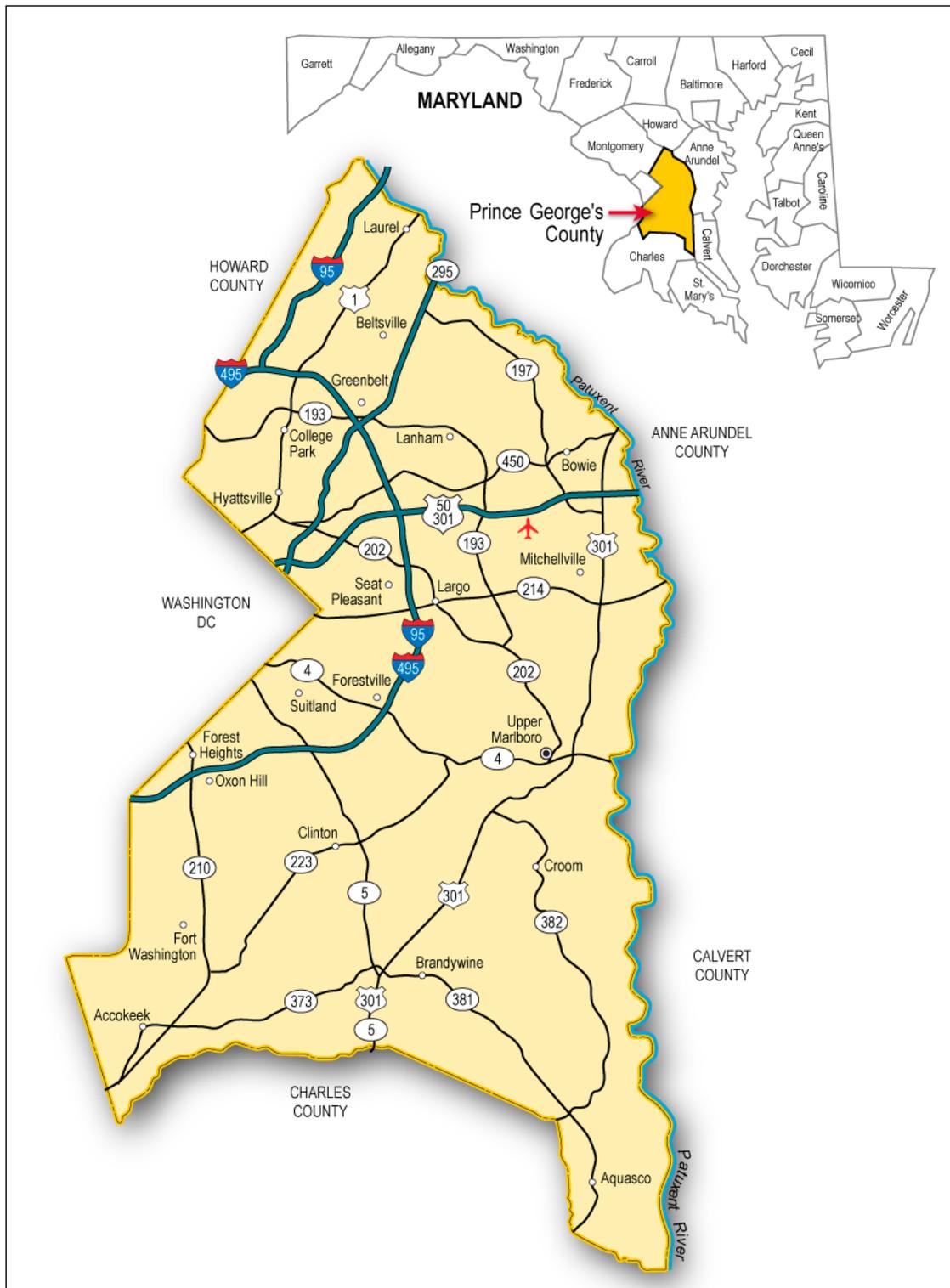


Figure 2: Modern (2008) configuration of Prince George's County.

and Westphalia soil types. The Collington type is the most extensive soil type in the county and is dominant throughout the county center. The Westphalia type consists of large contiguous areas and a large total acreage in Prince George's County, and Sassafras soils are extensive throughout the county as well. Only the Marr soil type, while of a fairly large acreage in specific areas, has a small overall area in the county. Bonsteel (1911) provides a detailed discussion of the optimal crops for each soil type in the county.

The northern portion of Prince George's County has been described as a gently rolling landscape with broad stream valleys (Kirby et al. 1975). The southern portion is a dissected, low plateau. The central portion of this plateau is flat to gently sloping, whereas V-shaped valleys with steep slopes are present along the Patuxent and Potomac Rivers. Landform elevation also reflects the presence of the major rivers, the gently rolling landscape, and the presence of a section of the Piedmont province in the county. Elevations are near sea level along the lower reaches of the Patuxent and Potomac Rivers, whereas they rise to 365 feet above sea level to the north in the Piedmont province portion of the county.

Although the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers form the major waterways within Prince George's County, there are many smaller streams throughout. Most are characterized as normally sluggish with broad valleys and many have accumulated large deposits of silt (Kirby et al. 1975). Estuaries are found in the lower reaches where the streams flow into the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers in the southern part of the county.

Prince George's County's climate is considered a humid, temperate semicontinental climate with mild winters and warm, moist summers (Kirby et al. 1975). January is typically the coldest month while July is the warmest. Precipitation ranges from just below three inches to just above five inches during a typical month, although the rainfall pattern can be variable due to summer storms, tropical storms, and hurricanes. Snow also varies considerably year to year, but historically averages 19 inches. Important to its agricultural base, the last frost in spring typically occurs in late April to early May, while the first frost in autumn takes place during mid- to late October.

Prior to colonization, Prince George's County was covered by a hardwood forest dominated by oaks, sweet gum, and yellow poplar. Prince George's County lies within the Atlantic Slope Section of the Oak-Pine Forest Region as defined by Braun (1950:268–269) and the Oak-Hickory-Pine forest association (Kuchler 1964:1). This association is typified by medium-tall to tall forests of broadleaf deciduous and needleleaf evergreen trees. Dominant species include white oak (*Quercus alba*), post oak (*Quercus stellata*), hickory (*Carya* spp.), and pine (*Pinus* spp.). Subdominant species include a variety of other hickory and oak species, dogwood (*Cornus florida*), persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), sweet gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), yellow poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), and Virginia pine (*Pinus virginiana*). Native forest development

within the Coastal Plain has been largely influenced by topography and the abundance of water. Specific forest communities within the association are influenced by various other factors including elevation, hydrology, slope, soils, and underlying geology. A significant portion of the county is still covered by forests, although the species composition has changed. Many of the previously cleared areas, now being reforested as agricultural fields, are abandoned and invaded by species of conifers, especially the Virginia pine. Tidal areas are covered by coarse grasses and rushes.

## **Exploration, Colonial, and Antebellum Periods: A Brief Overview**

Early exploration of the Chesapeake Bay area began in the late 1500s (Figure 3). Spanish missionaries may have explored parts of southern Maryland in the sixteenth century, but it was not until John Smith's voyages on the Potomac in 1608 that documented contact occurred between Europeans and Native Americans in the region. Maryland was established as an English colony in 1634 and quickly became an important tobacco-producing colony. Historic settlement of the inner coastal plain area began in the middle 1600s, with settlement focused along the Potomac and Patuxent Rivers, including the area that was to become Prince George's County (Kulikoff 1986). The relations between Native Americans and Europeans in southern Maryland were strained from the start and deteriorated as colonists encroached upon the land of the natives. By the beginning of the 1700s, most local Native American tribes had either migrated from Maryland or had been decimated by disease.

By 1680 a stable agricultural society based heavily on tobacco had been established in much of Maryland, including Prince George's County (Kulikoff 1986). Early landowners in the area established manors and plantations that covered many hundreds of acres. Early in this process, labor for the plantation was supplied mainly by indentured servants (Kulikoff 1986; Engerman et al. 2006). However, by 1690 this pattern began to change. Between 1698 and 1703 an average of 750 slaves per year were imported into Maryland, whereas after 1703, the average increased to 1,500 per year. Both Kulikoff (1986) and Engerman et al. (2006) suggest that the reasons for this change include the scarcity of indentured servants, better life expectancy among slaves, and the increased demand for Chesapeake tobacco.

The growth of trade and shipping also led to the development of port towns and trading centers, including several in Prince George's County. Earliest in the county were Charles Town, Queene Anne, Mill Town, and Nottingham on the Patuxent River, Upper Marlboro, Aire, Piscataway, and Bladensburg (Pearl 1991a). The government changed in Maryland from proprietary to provincial to state. Religious, social, cultural, and educational institutions were established and small local industries began to appear. Transportation in the 1700s relied at first on rivers, but as the century progressed, roads were cleared to facilitate the connection between port towns and churches (Kulikoff 1986; Pearl 1991b).

		Statewide Development	Labor Force	Prince George's County
1870	Agricultural - Industrial Transition	Establishment of Railroad Systems	Emancipation	Highest Slave Population in Maryland
1830		Industrial and Commercial Development	Slaves/Tenants	
		Continued Emphasis on Tobacco Economy	Free Black Population Increasing	
1795	Rural Agrarian Intensification	Establishment of Road Systems		
1760		Development of Ports and Trade Centers	Highest Slave Numbers	Bladensburg Port Established (1742)
1720		Stabilization of Tobacco-Based Economy		Population 50% Enslaved Upper Marlborough Established as County Seat (1721)
1680	Euro-American Contact & Settlement	Establishment of Manor/Plantation System	Increased Slave Importation	Piscataway Established (1707) Act to Establish Port Towns (1706) County Established (1696) Charles Town Established (1683)
1645		Development of Tobacco-Based Economy	Few Slaves	
		Native American Decimation and Emigration		Part of Calvert and Charles Counties
1610		Maryland Colony Established	Indentured Servants	
1570		Early Exploration		

Figure 3: Historic chronology of Prince George's County from 1570 to the Civil War.

With the onset of the nineteenth century, new manufacturing technologies began to influence the traditionally agricultural society. Commerce and industry became increasingly important in the Western Shore region of Maryland, and the impacts of the Industrial Revolution were felt most strongly in new transportation systems and local manufacturing industries. Agricultural development expanded, and the number of small farms began to increase. By 1870, the area was still largely agricultural, with crossroads communities, rural churches, schools, mills, blacksmith shops, and other small enterprises supporting a largely agricultural economy.

Prior to 1864/1865, the economy of Prince George's County was based on plantations whose slave labor accounted for more than half the population. Engerman et al. (2006) illustrate the wealth that this system created in the slave-holding states, inclusive of Maryland, and by extension, a similar trend was expected for Prince George's County. For instance, the value of slaves in the slave-holding states rose from \$291 million in 1805 to \$3 billion in 1860. Also, in cotton-growing states (which Maryland was not), 44 percent of all wealth was represented by slaves. Maryland may have run somewhat counter to this trend. The slave population fell in Maryland between 1790 and 1860, such that the number of free blacks in the state nearly equaled the number of slaves (Engerman et al. 2006). Whether slavery was a profitable institution remains a continued area of debate among historians.

The Maryland State Archives website "Beneath the Underground: The Flight to Freedom and Communities in Antebellum Maryland" provides an insightful overview of slavery in Prince George's County prior to the Civil War, and the following is summarized from that source (Maryland State Archives 2007). Although Maryland had the highest number of free blacks of any state during this period, Prince George's County had the largest number of slaves of all the counties, and by the beginning of the Civil War it had the fewest free blacks. This free black population was especially concentrated around Upper Marlboro. Research also indicates that newspapers of the antebellum period carried more notices of runaway slaves from Prince George's County (22 percent of all notices) than any other county in Maryland. The proximity of the area to Washington, D.C., which had a significant number of Underground Railroad participants and free blacks, probably encouraged slaves from Prince George's County to attempt to flee to freedom. It is likely that slaves made extensive use of their kinship networks on the plantations in Prince George's County as well as those in Washington, D.C., and other Maryland counties. The Civil War brought emancipation to the slaves in Maryland in 1864 with the ratification of a new state constitution.

## **War, Reconstruction, and Industrialization (circa 1860–1890)**

The Civil War, like all wars, marked a large-scale social crisis, and so may be construed as a marker for both the end and beginning of eras (Figure 4). Although Reconstruction as a federal policy ended with the presidency of Rutherford Hayes in 1877, its effects on the economy of former slaveholder states, including Maryland, lasted well into the succeeding decade (Brogan 1990:382). With the end of the Civil War and slavery, the Southern plantation economy came to an abrupt end. The dissolution of this system had far-reaching consequences, not just for the practice of agriculture but for all aspects of the national economy and society (Bruchey 1974:397; Ransom and Sutch 1977:81–105). One immediate effect was the dispersion of the liberated African-American population of nearly four million persons (Belz 1978:48–49; Brogan 1990:358; USCB 2007), who traveled in search of gainful employment, adventure, and friends and relatives from whom they had been separated (Brogan 1990:362–363; Ransom and Sutch 1977:1–13).

Some 87,000 African-American slaves inhabited Maryland in 1860, compared with about 84,000 “free colored persons” (Brugger 1988:299; USCB 2007). However, in Prince George’s County there were about 12,500 slaves, in contrast with just 1,200 free-born blacks (USCB 2007). By 1870, the African-American population of Prince George’s County had dropped, due mainly to emigration to other parts of Maryland, especially to Baltimore, and out of state (Brugger 1988:784) (see also Table 1 and Figure 1). Southern Maryland, including Prince George’s County, suffered critical shortages of labor, and in the years following the war, wages for farm work rose sharply (Bruchey 1974:397). Just before the end of the war, the Freedmen’s Bureau (officially, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands) was established by an act of Congress. Its task was to provide emergency food and medicine to refugees, primarily African-American, as well as education, including job training, and employment opportunities to emancipated slaves.

After the Civil War, the country as a whole became more urban. Maryland followed this general trend as nearby Baltimore grew, with most of this new population coming from European immigration and population movement within the United States, including newly freed slaves leaving their former plantations. Prince George’s County, however, witnessed little urbanization until the end of the nineteenth century. Labor unions too were on the rise during this period. However, lacking an industrial base, unionization was negligible in Prince George’s County. The county continued to be rural with an agricultural economy.

The price of tobacco, the principal cash crop of Prince George’s County, had declined in the world market before the Civil War, and the decline accelerated after the war (Brogan 1990:369; Brugger 1988:268, 310). Moreover, tobacco had depleted the soils of the region, demanding intensive artificial fertilization.

	Statewide Development	Prince George's County	
		Agriculture, Industry, and Military	Social Developments
Present			
1960			Rapid Suburban Development
1950	Decreased Farm Size	Decline of Agricultural Economy Decline of Laurel Industry	Ft. Washington Made a Park
1940	World War II Economic Recovery  Depression	Andrews AFB Established  ERCO Plant  Increased Tenancy and Truck Farming	Suitland Federal Center Established  Rise of Automobile Suburbs
1930	Appearance of Planned Communities and Suburbs		First African-American High School Opens in Lakeland
1920		Armories Established	
1910		Beltsville Agricultural Center Established	Rosenwald Schools Public Utilities in Suburbs Rise of Streetcar Suburbs
1900			First Public High School Opens in Laurel
1890	Industrial and Commercial Dominance of Economy	Paid Laborers/Tenants	Rise of Railroad Suburbs Jim Crow Laws
1880	Crop Diversification	B&P Railroad Established  End of Contract Labor	County School Board Controls Black Schools
1870		Ring Forts Abandoned	Freedmen's Bureau Schools

Figure 4: Postbellum historic chronology of Prince George's County from 1870 to the present.

The demise of the plantation also meant the relative scarcity of certain extensively cultivated staples, such as wheat (Bruchey 1974:397). The demise of the plantation system and the resulting decline in the production of cash crops, as well as the net decrease in population, stalled building and architectural development in the region. Plantations were often divided, existing ancillary buildings destroyed or converted, and simpler owner or tenant buildings, also of wood or brick, were erected. Economic resources were invested instead mainly in reforming agriculture and encouraging industry.

Just as the market in and cultivation of tobacco diminished, so too did the mean size of farms. This trend accelerated after the Civil War as large plantations were divided into smaller farms (Bruchey 1974:398). The change in agricultural régime was reinforced by the expansion of the American “bread basket” into the Midwest and the general economic depression of the 1870s and 1880s (Brogan 1990:396). Prince George’s County responded by increasing production of foodstuffs for regional markets (market and truck farming) (Brugger 1988:328).

Those who probably gained most from the new agricultural arrangements in the South were local merchants, who supplied Northern manufactured goods and foodstuffs and were able to make loans of money and equipment (Brogan 1990:376–377; Ransom and Sutch 1977:126–148). Gradually, a new class of merchant-planters arose, and they, together with those planters of the Old South who survived, were able to entice poor and sometimes landless white and blacks into an arrangement of tenancy (Brogan 1990:375; Brugger 1988:329). This arrangement became common in Prince George’s County (Bruchey 1974:398–399, 401; Brugger 1988:329). Firms in Baltimore in particular, but also elsewhere on the coast, sold goods and foodstuffs on credit to farmers after the war (Brugger 1988:317–318).

Unfortunately, economic prosperity was not the rule in the country or county after the war. Episodes of economic depression, the most significant happening in 1873 and 1877 but lasting well into the 1880s, had several causes: debt cancellation, rampant speculation (initially in railroads), industrial overproduction, agricultural underproduction, and the miscalculated federal antidepression strategy of allowing “greenback” notes issued to fund the war to be converted to gold (Brogan 1990:396; Hungerford 1928:121). There was also a period of decline in European demand for American goods after 1871 (Brugger 1988:328).

Iron and steel production, including that of the Muirkirk Furnace in Prince George’s County, persisted, although there was insufficient quantity of iron ores in Maryland to keep up with demand by the railroads (Brogan 1990:388–389; Bruchey 1974:403–404). Flour and grist mills, as well as textile mills, also continued to be of commercial importance (Brugger 1988:330–331). Buildings associated with industries and railroads were constructed after the war. These included general merchandise stores, often at rural crossroads (e.g., the Coffren

Store in Croom, Prince George's County), textile mills, ironworks, and railway stations and blockhouses (M-NCPPC 1993:24). Railroad growth in particular led to the embellishment of existing passenger stations and the construction of elaborate railroad hotels (Harwood 1990; 42-56; Hungerford 1928:125-127), although no such hotels were constructed in Prince George's County.

The development of postbellum Prince George's County was intimately tied to the expansion of the railroads. A strong argument can be made that railroads were the fulcrum of growth, being both cause and consequence. Railroads not only made transportation more efficient, thereby opening new markets, but they also drove coal mining for fuel and iron and steel production for rails and rolling stock (Brogan 1990:388-389). In Maryland, track mileage increased from a mere 373 in 1860 to 1,430 in 1914 (Bruchey 1974:469). In the single decade of 1865 to 1875 in Maryland, mileage grew from 466 to 1,077 (Stover 1955:60). Prince George's County contributed to the added mileage when in 1867 the Pennsylvania Railroad financed the proposed Baltimore & Potomac Railroad (B&P), which ran through eastern and southern portions of the county. The line, an alternative to the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) line between Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, provided a route for the farmers of southern Prince George's County to transport their produce to market (Pearl 1991c). Beginning in the 1880s streetcars began to replace horse-drawn buses in the District of Columbia, and these lines spread northward into the county (Brugger 1988:358, 443; Callcott 1985:20). Streetcars complemented the railway lines in promoting suburbanization, by linking together separate towns and villages into suburbs (MSHA 2003:B-14). In particular, railroad communities sprang up in rural Prince George's County along the border with Washington, D.C., (Berger 1991a).

Communication was further facilitated by the extension of the telegraph line, mainly along railway easements. Samuel Morse had established the first line between Baltimore and Washington in 1844 along the B&O tracks in Prince George's County (Brogan 1990:387, 389). Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, an extension of the telegraph principle, was invented in 1876. In its first decade of use, it was restricted mainly to businesses (Brugger 1988:396).

Turning from agriculture, development, and economics, the Civil War also had a profound effect on social relations after the war. President Andrew Johnson did little to enforce postbellum federal laws in ex-Confederate states, except those that followed from the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in 1865. A measure of Johnson's lack of commitment was his veto of legislation renewing funds for the Freedmen's Bureau in 1866 (overridden by Congress). The Freedmen's Bureau was eventually dissolved in 1868 (Brogan 1990:364). Southern legislatures passed "Black Codes" that denied or restricted economic rights and opportunities to African-Americans (Brogan 1990:358). Indeed, Maryland's Black Codes proved less successful than later Jim Crow statutes. For example, in 1867 the Freedmen's Bureau and the federal circuit court prevented a law making black apprenticeship obligatory (Belz 1978:144-145).

Maryland, like other border states, was treated more leniently than the states of the defeated Confederacy. Maryland's lawmakers came to an agreement on a new constitution in 1864 that abided by Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (Brugger 1988:302), preempting enforced conformity with US constitutional amendments consequent to the war. The 15th Amendment, guaranteeing African-American men the right to vote, was passed in 1870 (Brogan 1990:364; Mantell 1973:99). Maryland had abolished slavery with its new constitution, the result of a process led by Delegate Thomas Swann, a Unionist Democrat (Brugger 1988:302). Swann was elected governor in 1866, and he allowed many unrepentant proslavery Democrats and ex-Confederates to run for office, despite the requirement of loyalty oaths. He opposed "Negro suffrage" (Brugger 1988:302; Callcott 1969:14–15). The resulting legislature set about undoing many of the provisions of the 1864 constitution. It refused to ratify the 15th Amendment in 1870, abstaining until 1973 (Brugger 1988:306). Nonetheless, African-Americans in Maryland voted in general elections for the first time in over 60 years in 1870 (Callcott 1969:23–32). Southern states, including Maryland, reacted against the 15th Amendment by passing Jim Crow laws, effectively denying African-Americans voting rights through poll taxes, literacy tests, and the infamous "grandfather clause," as well as restricting what they could do in public (Brogan 1990:382). In Maryland, the Jim Crow attitude was felt initially in segregation in public education and public transportation and in unsuccessful attempts to deny blacks the ballot (Fox 1974:499–500).

Public education was instituted with the 1864 constitution, as a result of the efforts of Libertus Von Bokkeln, a Presbyterian minister, who lobbied for the system. Article 8 of the Maryland constitution of 1864 was so popular among legislators that it easily passed in spite of a hard core of Democratic opposition. It instituted a centralized system of tax-funded public schools (Brugger 1988:307), and Von Bokkeln became the first superintendent of public instruction (Brugger 1988:307; Fox 1974:511). From 1866 to 1867, 1,279 schools were founded, which served 71,500 pupils (Fox 1974:512). Von Bokkeln also lobbied for a bill that became law in January 1865, which allocated that portion of the education tax paid by African-Americans to the construction of separate schools for black children, although the final version contained a legal loophole that allowed counties to take education of African-Americans as optional (Fox 1974:513; Jones Anglin 1983:12). In Prince George's County the Freedmen's Bureau provided some of the initial schoolhouses (Brugger 1988:308; Fox 1974:514), until the Prince George's County Board of School Commissioners took over management and maintenance of schools in 1872 (Pearl 1996:5). About the same time several institutions of higher education were founded. The Maryland Agricultural College in College Park, later the University of Maryland, had been founded in 1856 (Callcott 1966; Fox 1974:530), and it became a state land grant institution in 1867 (Brugger 1988:276). In 1865, a private foundation was organized for the education of African-Americans to establish the Baltimore Colored Normal School, which opened in 1867 and would eventually become Bowie State University (Fox 1974:529; Jones Anglin 1983:13).

## **Federal Growth and the Progressive Era (1890–1917)**

At the time that Reconstruction ended, rapid industrialization in the North and South, coupled with recent immigrant populations providing cheap labor, led to conflicts between factory owners and organized labor. Not only were labor unions ascendant nationwide, but attempts also were made toward “progressive” social and political reform (Brogan 1990:403). Simultaneously, anti-African-American Jim Crow laws advanced across the country, including Maryland and Prince George’s County, during this period.

Although progressive social and political changes, as well as industrialization, may define this period in many parts of the nation, Prince George’s County remained largely a rural society based on tobacco agriculture. Agricultural practices changed little between 1890 and World War I. The tenancy system became entrenched, and tobacco cultivation persisted in Prince George’s County (Bruchey 1974:398–401).

The drive toward industrialization and innovation during this period can be readily discerned in the transportation sector of the national economy. The national railroad network continued to expand, especially on the East Coast (Harwood 1990:51). The use and adaptation of the railway to passenger travel grew. The Chesapeake Bay Beach Railroad was built from Washington, D.C., through Prince George’s County in order to bring tourists to coastal resorts (Pearl 1991c:45–46; Williams 1975). Electric streetcar lines also grew, especially in the vicinity of the District of Columbia. The first streetcar lines in the burgeoning suburbs in Prince George’s County began in 1892. Between 1892 and 1910, tracks were laid to serve Bladensburg, Hyattsville, Laurel, and Mount Rainier (Berger 1991a).

As the nineteenth century came to a close, the expansion of these suburbs began to be planned, with subdivisions of major land tracts platted (Berger 1991b:51). Property development in this period was aimed mainly at moderate-income, middle-class families. Crossroads stores adapted to their new suburban surroundings, internalizing more of their stock and providing for the needs of new homeowners. In Prince George’s County, an example may be seen in the Hyattsville Hardware Store (M-NCPPC 1993:25). And as the public school system had to accommodate a growing population, especially around the District of Columbia, schoolhouses increased in size and complexity; Laurel High School, built in 1899, was the first public high school in Prince George’s County (Bryant and Schreider 2000:75).

In the 1890s farmers petitioned the Assembly for improvement of “farm-to-market” routes. The introduction of the automobile helped spur the state’s Geological and Economic Survey to undertake the first comprehensive scientific study of Maryland’s road and bridges (Brugger 1988:429). Following this, Maryland established the first state highway system in the nation, buying up all the private turnpikes between 1908 and 1921. Existing roads were widened

with concrete or stone block shoulders, or repaved with asphalt or concrete. New roads were built, including the Baltimore-Washington Boulevard, begun in 1906 (predecessor to Route 295), and others into southern Maryland through Prince George's County. Motorcars and resurfaced roads encouraged roadside business, including service stations.

Not long after Orville and Wilbur Wright invented the airplane in 1903, Prince George's County was chosen as the site of the new Army Air Corps's training center and airfield. The Air Corps—originally part of the Signal Corps because planes were thought to be useful only for reconnaissance—selected College Park because it was close to its headquarters in Washington and only a short train ride from the War Office (Brugger 1988:437–438). Wilbur Wright was its first instructor (Brugger 1988:437; King 1991a:55).

This period also saw the rise of Jim Crow in Prince George's County and Maryland as a whole. Senator Arthur Pue Gorman, who grew up in Laurel but was long the Democratic Party boss in Baltimore, attempted to disenfranchise African-American voters during the first decade of the twentieth century (Brugger 1988:385–386). The problem, in his mind, was that African-Americans consistently voted for Republicans. The constitutional amendment he sought would have employed two strategies: first, a “grandfather clause” stating that only those persons or their direct descendants who were already entitled to vote when the 15th Amendment to the US Constitution went into effect could vote in Maryland; second, only persons who could read and give a “reasonable” interpretation of the state's constitution to a voter registrar could vote (Brugger 1988:420; Crooks 1974:612). At the time, nearly 50 percent of all registered black voters were illiterate (Brugger 1988:420). The year before, Delegate William R. Wilson of Queen Anne's County, tried more blatant trickery, introducing a “ballot simplification” bill that applied only to Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Frederick, Garrett, Kent, Prince George's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, and Worcester Counties; it forbade the use of party emblems, party names, or party designations of any kind on the ballot itself, but it allowed parties to post specific information about their candidates on the walls of polling places, for perusal by literate voters (Callcott 1969:109–110). Both Gorman's and Wilson's proposals were defeated. Similar bills were introduced in 1909 and 1911, but they too were defeated, in large measure because the Negro Suffrage League joined forces with the recently formed League of Foreign-Born Voters (mainly people from Eastern and Southern Europe) and fellow Republicans (Brugger 1988:422–423; Crooks 1974:644–654).

Jim Crow laws were becoming common in the country. In 1908 three Jim Crow laws were passed in Maryland. One required steamship companies to segregate toilets and sleeping quarters by race; another required that railroads operating in Anne Arundel, Calvert, Charles, St. Mary's, and Prince George's Counties provide separate cars, rather than simply separate compartments, for the two races; and still another instituted segregation on electric streetcars (Callcott 1969:136). Furthermore, lynching of blacks was on the rise in the Deep South and was creeping northward (Green 1963:207; Brogan 1990:634).

Educational developments in this period included the creation of the University of Maryland from the Agricultural College in 1916. The Baltimore Colored Normal School (then only a two-year training college) was renamed the Maryland Normal School in 1908 upon joining the state educational system, and it was relocated from Baltimore to Bowie in 1910 (Jones Anglin 1983:39–42). Despite advances in public primary, secondary, and higher education, including provisions for training teachers for African-American schools, black education was still inferior when compared with white education in the state. In 1895, seven counties—Anne Arundel, Charles, Prince George’s, Queen Anne’s, St. Mary’s, Somerset, and Worcester—made no contributions to black schools from county funds (Brugger 1988:419). The Maryland Educational Survey Commission report of 1914 indicated such improvements as an increase in the number of high schools in the state from 28 in 1905 to 65 in 1914, and there being one “central industrial school for Negroes” in each of 16 of Maryland’s 23 counties (Fox 1974:518). However, as late as 1916, there were no high schools for African-Americans in any of the counties, including Prince George’s.

## **The World Wars and the Time Between (1917–1945)**

The progressive era ended with World War I, which was a national effort entailing a large overseas expedition and industrial production of mechanized weapons. The period between the world wars is marked by contrary trends. Until the Wall Street crash of October 1929, the period was marked by economic growth in part dependent on speculation in monetary lending and investment. In contrast, the second part of the period was marked by massive federal investment in social welfare and work programs and infrastructure to counteract the effects of the Great Depression.

Prince George’s County continued to be a largely rural society based on tobacco agriculture, and the tobacco industry underwent something of a renaissance during World War I. Supplies of quick-burning Arabian and Turkish tobacco were disrupted, and cigarette manufacturers realized that they could get the same product from Prince George’s County at a better price. Prices had been declining steadily since the middle 1800s, but between 1915 and 1918 they climbed from \$8.50 to \$30.00 per hundredweight, and remained above pre-war levels through the 1920s (Brugger 1988:460). A general economic recession occurred in 1921 and persisted in farming until the last year of the decade. The domestic market for farm products was saturated; there were “too many” farmers for the market. High national tariffs prevented foreigners from earning the dollars they needed to purchase crops from the United States. Moreover, Australia, Canada, and newly Communist Russia competed with the United States for foreign food markets. Those farmers who stayed on the land, often those who out-competed or were simply more fortunate than their neighbors, still found capital difficult to obtain, and they relied increasingly on either federal crop subsidies or incentives to reduce acreage or increase set-aside, such as in the McNary-Haugen Act of 1920 (Brogan 1990:519; Brugger 1988:495). Industrial jobs in the cities were more sustainable, and the

number of jobs there increased during World War I. The single biggest impact on the agricultural economy during this period, as on the rest of the national economy, was the stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent depression. When the worst effects of this were past, ten years later, tobacco sales became decentralized. The “auction method,” which had already been adopted in Kentucky and the Carolinas, was introduced to Prince George’s County. It entailed the construction of local warehouses for sales such as the Edelen Brothers Warehouse and Planters Tobacco Warehouse, which were located in Upper Marlboro but have since been demolished.

Transportation advances continued to be a stimulus for the transformation of Prince George’s County from largely rural to increasingly suburban. The automobile had by far the greatest impact on transportation in the 1920s. Nearly two million cars were produced in 1920, and this figure more than doubled by 1929. In 1929, almost 27 million cars, trucks, and motorized buses were registered in the United States. The ease of transportation in the county, both by road and rail, as well as an increase in the federal workforce, led to the growth of many older communities and the establishment of new suburbs. Such suburbs as Carmody Hills, Berwyn, Cheverly, and Lincoln were laid out alongside such older railroad communities as Tuxedo, Landover, and Lanham and the even older settlements of Bladensburg and Oxon Hill in order to accommodate the new professional and industrial populations of the District, as well as the growth of longer-established and mainly African-American populations (Brugger 1988:443; MSHA 2003). Domestic architecture followed trends that had been established before the war, although sometimes with fanciful variations (M-NCPPC 1993:25). The Bellamy House (“Belmar,” 1925; MIHP PG:69-22), is a fine example of a suburban middle-class home in Prince George’s County. The latter is an example of the Sears Roebuck “Alhambra” model (Bryant and Schreider 2000:51, 59). Some communal or community architecture reflects the affluence of the pre- and post-depression segments of this period, for example, the Marlboro Hunt Club with its extensive additions dating to the 1920s and 1930s (MIHP PG:82B-2) and the early 1950s Prince George’s Ballroom (MIHP PG:72-22).

The most important New Deal Era housing and planning program in Prince George’s County was the community of Greenbelt. Greenbelt was one of three “greenbelt towns” (all with “green” in their name) built between 1935 and 1937 by the US Department of Agriculture Resettlement Administration as part of Roosevelt’s National Recovery Program (Fischetti 1967:1-2; M-NCPPC 1993:25). The community contained abundant green space, pedestrian ways, playgrounds, and a shopping center within 0.5 miles of every home (Brugger 1988:514; Fischetti 1967:1, 6-7). It set new standards for suburban design, by making secondary roads within super blocks conform to natural topography and introducing houses that opened up directly onto communal space (Brugger 1988:514). In preparation for the possibility of entering World War II, the federal government paid for an additional 1,000 units at Greenbelt as part of 43 “defense housing projects” throughout the United States (Fischetti

1967:5). Greenbelt's purpose was to show the soundness of a completely planned community based on garden city principles, to provide useful work to men on unemployment rolls, and to supply low-cost housing to "families with modest incomes" with an interest in "group living" (Brugger 1988:514; Fischetti 1967:1). The majority of those who settled in Greenbelt ended up working for the federal government (Brugger 1988:514).

The most important development in suburban planning consisted of achieving the infrastructure reforms aimed for before World War I and integrating Washington, D.C., with its suburbs. The Maryland General Assembly created the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission in 1916 to study the potential for a sewage disposal system in the suburban belt around the District of Columbia that could be integrated with that in Washington (Brugger 1988:443). Its report in 1918 found that the population of suburban Montgomery and Prince George's Counties together had grown from about 20,000 persons in 1910 to about 32,000. These counties reached an agreement with District engineers to create fresh water pumping stations for home use and fire hydrants and to complete the integration of their modernized sewage treatment systems with the District's, which had begun as early as 1907 (Brugger 1988:446–447).

By the middle of 1940, the United States was preparing for war in Europe. In June Roosevelt announced that he would aid the opponents of Germany with material resources and that the United States would prepare for any emergency. The following September, Congress enacted the first peacetime conscription, and by the middle of October, some 200,000 Marylanders had registered (Burdette 1974:784). Numerous businesses in Prince George's County were awarded military contracts (War Records Division 1950:463–472). The influx of civilian and military personnel to take various jobs and receive training in the region was greater than that preceding America's entry into World War I (Hiebert and MacMaster 1976:329). Defense plant employment alone grew by 50,000 and all new business employment by nearly 100,000 (Burdette 1974:785). It was estimated that at least 100,000 new housing units were needed, and it was at this time that Greenbelt expanded. New subdivisions evolved to accommodate the growing population, which included Boulevard Heights, Carmody Hills, Green Meadows, and Landover Hills (Hiebert and MacMaster 1976:300; MSHA 2003). In the summer of 1942, the federal government claimed eminent domain of property in Camp Springs and turned it into Andrews Field (now Andrews Air Force Base), and the Naval Radio Station was established in Cheltenham (War Records Division 1950).

## **United States Hegemony and Early Cold War (1945–1958)**

The post-World War II era was a period of American military and political hegemony, especially in the Western Hemisphere and Europe. However, America had a powerful military, industrial, and ideological rival in the Soviet Union, and the global contest between the two superpowers became known

as the Cold War. The first part of this era was a period of unprecedented industrial, commercial, and financial growth in the United States, with high-wage jobs in skilled labor bolstered by sales of American manufactures in foreign markets, and American companies successfully lending to and investing in foreign countries (Harvey 1990:121–140).

This period, too, witnessed a major transformation across Prince George's County. In the decade immediately following World War II, farm sizes decreased to an average of 100 acres but continued to concentrate on tobacco, although many incorporated livestock and such crops as grains, hay, fruit trees, and vegetables. The greatest change in agriculture was technological. Mechanical traction had become cheaper and more easily available and artificial fertilizers and pesticides, many invented in the 1940s, were widely used (International Programme on Chemical Safety 1979; Shipley 1977). In contrast, the county witnessed the explosive growth of Washington's suburbs. The population of Prince George's County in 1930 was a little over 60,000 persons. By 1950, it was over 194,000 and by 1960, it was almost 360,000. The population of the Washington metropolitan area in 1930 was about 706,000. It had swelled to 1.5 million in 1950, and it would approach 3 million by 1970 (Community Renewal Program 1970; Kirby et al. 1975:1). This growth presented the single most important planning issue after World War II. The Maryland General Assembly passed a veterans' emergency housing bill in 1946 that permitted communities to acquire surplus government buildings from the war and turn them into housing. Prince George's County bought 33 former barracks (Brugger 1988:554–555).

Beginning in 1947, private enterprise produced thousands of low-cost houses in new subdivisions around Washington. Typically, these houses were simple, rectangular single-story (plus eaves) cottages (some styled "Cape Cod") built on concrete slabs and often consisting of prefabricated parts shipped in from out of state. Unlike New Deal Greenbelt, much of the post-war housing was planned without concern for schools, playgrounds, or access streets. However, they were deliberately built near major thoroughfares, and their residents came to depend on automobile transportation (Brugger 1988:554–555; Callcott 1985:61–63). Major housing developments around Washington included Chillum, Langley Park, District Heights, Hillcrest Heights, and Glassmanor in Prince George's County (MSHA 2003:B-18). In the meantime, from 1949 to 1955, Greenbelt was sold to various private interests, and a community cooperative was established (Brugger 1988:579; Fischetti 1967:10–23). The community cooperative, Greenbelt Homes, Inc., controls about 1,600 homes in Greenbelt (MIHP PG:67-4). Dependence on the automobile led to the construction of suburban shopping centers, such as in Friendship Heights (1949), Wheaton Plaza (1954), and Congressional Plaza (1958) (Hiebert and MacMaster 1976:356–357).

Transportation, particularly the mass transit problem, became one of the defining political topics of post-war metropolitan areas. Although car sales

had slumped during the depression and gasoline was rationed during World War II, sales resumed with a vengeance after the war. At the same time, commuter train, streetcar, and bus use steadily decreased. The effect of the rise of the automobile and changes in public transportation was the demise of the nearly century-old metropolitan streetcar networks in Washington, D.C. In metropolitan Washington, D.C., the city and suburban line and its extension to Laurel, commonly known as the Maryland Line, went out of service in September 1958 (Berger 1991b:52). The effects of such processes were readily apparent in Prince George's County. Traffic between Baltimore and Washington became a critical social issue. Between 1937 and 1951, volume on US 1 between the two cities increased by 156 percent. Between Glen Burnie and the Potomac River Bridge on US 301, traffic increased in the same period by 349 percent (Brugger 1988:575).

Local and state governments responded to the problems of public transportation by establishing unified mass transit authorities with wide-ranging powers and by investing heavily in new roads. The governor of Maryland, Republican Theodore McKeldin, appointed the State Roads Commission of Maryland in 1951 to study the issues of car traffic. In 1952, the Commission returned a report recommending a 12-year highway program, planning for future increases in traffic, consisting of 3,450 miles of road improvements, including divided four-lane highways, and 300 miles of new roads. The Assembly approved the plan in 1953 and funded it with \$568 million to be raised with a gasoline tax (Brugger 1988:577–578; Burdette 1974:805). The Baltimore-Washington Expressway (now Parkway) was completed in 1954 (Brugger 1988:578–579; Burdette 1974:809; MSHA 2003:B-20). US 50 between Washington and Annapolis was completed in 1955. The Interstate Highway System—officially the Dwight D. Eisenhower National System of Interstate and Defense Highways—was not planned until 1956, and it would not be realized in Prince George's County until 1959.

From 1950 onward, another issue driving urban and suburban planning was civil defense. Federal agencies began to disperse their offices throughout metropolitan Washington, in the hope of being able to avoid total annihilation in the event of a nuclear attack (Hiebert and MacMaster 1976:351–355). The relocation of the National Institute of Health headquarters to Bethesda, for example, encouraged migration there for residence, and the overflow of residents increased the size of neighboring Silver Spring and areas farther to the east in Prince George's County (Green 1963:398; Hiebert and MacMaster 1976:351–355). Andrews Air Force Base was expanded and at that time became the principal site for the defense of Washington, D.C. As will be discussed in Chapters 8 and 9, the construction of Andrews Air Force Base led to the construction of roads and housing along the east side of Washington, D.C. Improved housing and transportation led to a rapid increase in population in this part of the county after the 1940s.

At the end of World War II, there was widespread fear that the United States economy would return to a depression. Massive unemployment loomed. Industrial layoffs reached 45,000 in Maryland by October 1945, with most in Baltimore. At the same time, some 34,000 Marylanders were demobilized and returned home to reclaim their old jobs or seek new ones, and there was the prospect of 170,000 more arriving soon and having to choose between military service and new employment (Brugger 1988:554; Burdette 1974:790–791). Several trends transpired to prevent economic depression. A great number of persons stayed in military service, being deployed for post-war reconstruction in Germany and Japan, and economic planners realized the research divisions in defense industries, which had expanded greatly during World War II, could be maintained (Brogan 1990:605).

Soldiers and sailors returning from World War II were eligible for low-interest loans from the federal government for the purchase of homes, among other provisions of the “G.I. Bill of Rights,” and ex-service personnel made up the majority of the inhabitants of the new, cheap houses in the suburbs (Brugger 1988:554; Burdette 1974:791). Supplementary loans from banks were made preferentially to whites, and persons selling houses in the suburbs were allowed to include “racial covenants” in their deeds, excluding African-Americans and Jews from acquiring the property. Although the US Supreme Court ruled in 1948 that such covenants were “unenforceable,” the practice would not be abolished until the 1960s (Callcott 1985:63; Johnson 2002:4). The G.I. Bill also provided federal subsidies for higher education. Training colleges and universities in Maryland had difficulty providing classroom space and faculty. Millions of dollars were put into expanding the University of Maryland system, a program that would continue for several decades to come (Burdette 1974:791). It was at this time that Bowie State College in Prince George’s County became part of this system (Jones Anglin 1983). At the same time, primary and secondary education remained racially segregated.

## **Summary**

In the preceding overview, four major and interconnected trends have been emphasized over the course of 90 years in the postbellum history of Prince George’s County. The first is the importance of agriculture to the county. Prince George’s County was based upon agriculture (itself based upon tobacco) and continued to be so during much of the postbellum period. Major aspects of agriculture in Prince George’s County are detailed in Chapter 3, and to a lesser extent in Chapter 9, of this report. In contrast to many counties, industry never proved to be an important component of the county economy outside of Laurel. The industrial basis of Prince George’s County, much of which serviced agriculture, is detailed in Chapter 4.

Although agriculture was the basis of this county, it is also true that its importance declined throughout the postbellum period. This decline was a process rather than an event, and as a process, it is difficult to pinpoint a date

or decade when the influence of agriculture diminished. If agriculture was the most important economic activity in the county after the Civil War, it is clear that it was not after World War II. And it is the other three trends that affected the position of agriculture in Prince George's County. In no special order, these three trends are the improvement and ease of transportation, the growth of the federal government, and the rise of suburbia. Transportation improvements in the county, including railroads, all-weather roads, and airports, were always intended to provide access to Washington, D.C. Improved transportation allowed workers of the expanding Washington, D.C., federal workforce to live away from the city in the railroad and later automobile suburbs of Prince George's County. It also allowed federal facilities to move outside of the city. Trends in transportation are detailed in Chapter 8. Trends associated with the rise of the federal government and suburbia are detailed in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 9. And it is to these detailed theme chapters that we turn next.