

# Lauraville

by Elsa Chick

A small town in Baltimore County until 1919, Lauraville was named for Laura Keene, whose father owned a large tract of land near Hamilton Avenue in the 1800's.

Settlement of Lauraville predates both Hamilton and Gardenville. Until 1898, when the Hamilton post office was built, residents of Hamilton as well as Lauraville traveled to Emmels Store, near what is now Coldspring Lane, to collect their mail. Since Harford Road was narrow and unpaved, this collection of mail and shopping excursion could be a long and taxing journey.

A map produced by V.M. Hopkins, dated 1876, indicated that only four roads existed between Hamilton Avenue and Erdman Avenue: Harford Turnpike (a toll road); Grindon Lane, running west of Harford; Southern Avenue, running east of Harford to Belair Road; and Belair Road. Lauraville was composed of about 60 large estates, farms and a few businesses. Several property owners during that centennial year whose names are recalled today by street names in the area are: John List, H. Weaver, John Erdman, J.H. Keene and J.S. Biddison.

On a hill at Herring Run Park stands a much-used, one-room building, which once housed a church. In 1852, a Sunday school was started in the school house on Grindon Lane. Eight years later, the Eutaw Methodist Protestant Church was built at Herring Run on land owned by the Green family. Residents of northern Lauraville, desiring a church closer to their homes, organized and built the Lauraville United Methodist Church, which is now situated at Southern Avenue and Harford Road.

The pastoral setting of the park and playground at Herring Run (so named because it was

once the spawning ground for herring) belies a very active past. In addition to the cotton mills and church, the park was also the site of the Hall Springs Hotel and several homes. Located where swings and slides stand today, the hotel was a popular resort. In 1912, when a problem developed with City water, many people traveled by streetcar to fill jugs from the pure spring water which still flows at the same spot.

In fact, many people still refer to this section of Herring Run Park, off of Argonne Drive and Harford Road, as "Hall Springs."

At a Hamilton Volunteer Fire Department picnic held there, a Mr. Collingood set up a beer stand. Some sailors who had imbibed a little too much became rowdy, but three toots on the fire horn brought more than enough firemen to douse the fire in the seamen's eyes.

In the 1920's, Lauraville boasted both a uniformed adult baseball club and a football team. Games were actively supported by members of the community and there was strong rivalry between Hamilton and Lauraville.

With regard to education in



Photo by Gilbert Witten

Each spring, many women came to Herring Run to collect dandelions for salads and wine. They wore long aprons with strings at the bottom which, when folded up and tied at the waist, formed a deep pocket for storage of the buds and greens.

Weber's Park (just south of the present MTA garage on Harford Road) was the scene of many picnics, carnivals and

Lauraville, tradition claims that the first school in Baltimore County was on the James Read homestead on Echodale hill. However, no remnant or proof of its existence remains. The two-room school on Grindon Lane still stands, though meeting a far different need today, as the Clifton Pleasure Club. In 1899, the Grindon Lane school was replaced by the Garrett Heights School, built on the second highest point in the



Photo by Gilbert Witten

Baltimore area, at 360 feet above sea level on property purchased from Mary Garrett. The first principal was Bradley K. Purdom, who later became assistant state superintendent of education and was responsible for moving the State Normal School (now Towson State University) from Broadway to York Road.

One of Garrett Heights' earliest and brightest students was Dr. Teresa Wiedefeld, whose family moved to Hamilton around 1900. Dr. Wiedefeld, after graduating from the State Normal School, returned to Garrett Heights as a teacher and later became president of Towson State Teachers College. Students and teachers traveled long distances in the early part of this century. Accounts have it that Dr. Wiedefeld's home was up a dirt road on the Killian farm, from which she would walk to Harford Road and board a trolley to

travel to her teaching job.

Edward van Reuth was a Dutch-born artist who owned property on Harford Road. One of his children founded a florist business at Harford Road and Goodwood Avenue, one of several Lauraville enterprises still operating today. The Rosenbergs operated a grocery on Harford Road at Rosekemp. The Sachs (now called Bond) Lumber Company was a thriving business in the early 1900's.

G. Kenneth Greer started a printing shop in a chicken coop in 1919, evicting the chickens by eating them. In the 1920's, his business outgrew three different shops built for him in the 2900 Grindon Avenue by Mr. Munder, and finally he moved his trade to its present location at 4300 Harford Road. As Mr. Greer's business outgrew his shops, so too did the Munder Restaurant. Munder's is remembered by many people because of the fine German food served by well-trained waiters until it closed in the 1950's.

One of the earliest and most successful businesses was the D. Markley Supply Company. On land purchased by his father in 1844, David Markley built a business which included over 20 employees, two large buildings, and a stable for over two dozen horses. Markley's sold wood and coal, farm equipment, foodstuffs and domestic goods. The Markleys were highly civic-minded people. Farmers from Carroll, Harford and outlying Baltimore counties rested at his stables overnight on trips to and from Baltimore. Mrs. Markley was often in attendance on the sick and women in childbirth. Saturday night dances were held in the Markleys' barn. When the fire bell sounded, Markley horses pulled the fire equipment to the blaze.

Located directly across from Markley's since the 1800's, the Lauraville Fire Department has served as a major community center. In the later 1800's, the Lauraville Social Circle held dances at the firehouse on Wednesday nights. The first

firehouse was a one-story wooden building, later replaced by a brick structure in 1912, with funds raised by a community carnival. Nearly a century following the opening of the first firehouse, the present modern structure was constructed on the same site. The Lauraville Fire Department was for many years a volunteer unit, where all able-bodied men left their work or leisure at the sound of the fire bell. A coded series of bell tolls gave the location of any fire in Lauraville or Hamilton. History lovers take pleasure in knowing that the fire bell still calls Lauraville men (and women) to action, as it calls worshippers to services at Zion Lutheran Church on Grindon Avenue.

Many of the familiar sites of Lauraville—Knoxes Farm, Garrett estates, Emmels, Bailey's stores, the Grindon Lane Pickle Factory, Frederick Webber's Brewery, Collins and Mann's blacksmith shop—are gone. But Lauraville lives on in memory, in new enterprises, in its institutions and in its residents. Today, Lauraville is a diverse racial, ethnic and intergenerational community whose citizens look forward to controlled change.

With a strong community organization, the Lauraville Improvement Association, the area is resisting blight while encouraging restoration and preservation of its fine old buildings. Garrett Heights School now houses active recreation programs for both children and adults. Lauraville's many churches house and support civic and social service programs, and its stores and businesses maintain a small-town atmosphere while offering modern metropolitan service. With the cooperation of Harbel, Inc., Lauraville today retains the best of small-town life within the context of a larger metropolis.