Appendix B

Rockville Pike History

OVERVIEW

AS A TRANSPORTATION ARTERY for centuries, Rockville Pike (Maryland Route 355) can claim to be the oldest road in Montgomery County. It is identified in the City of Rockville's 1986 Historic Resources Management Plan as a historic resource within the theme of Transportation. It was one of the longest thoroughfares in the Maryland colony and one of the first paved state roads in the county. It continues to be one of Montgomery County's most traveled roads.[1]

Historical names for the Pike have included the Sinquea Trail, the Road from Frederick to Georgetown, the Great Road, the Rolling Road, Braddock's road, the Turnpike Road, Rock Creek Road, and, as one of the prominent retail corridors in the metropolitan area, the Golden Mile. Even today, as one heads north from Wisconsin Avenue in the District of Columbia, the same length of road changes names to Rockville Pike, Hungerford Drive, Frederick Road, Urbana Pike, and to Market Street in Frederick.

Pike travelers have included Native Americans, colonial farmers, American presidents, fugitive slaves, Confederate and Union troops, wealthy Washingtonians retreating to their summer homes, and modern day commuters and shoppers.

EARLY HISTORY

The Pike began as a foot trail for local Native American tribes more than 10,000 years ago. Most trails in this area ran along rivers, but the Pike was a less typical inland route that led to the Potomac River. The use of the trail was taken over by European settlers in

[1] *Eileen S. McGuckian, Rockville: Portrait of a City. (Tennessee: Hillsboro, 2001) p. 3.*

Figure B.1: Charles Hungerford's tavern on Washington Street. Source: Peerless Rockville

the 1690s. Early land patents and surveys (1690s-1740s) contain references to a trail or path used by local Native Americans.

What is now Rockville was a crossroads hamlet in a sparsely settled frontier area in the 18th century. Travelers could stop at taverns (also known as "ordinaries") for food, drink, and lodging and local residents gathered at them as well.[2] Plantations were established by English and Scottish settlers and tobacco became the prime crop in the region as well as the legal tender. A system of "rolling roads" was ordered by the Maryland Assembly in 1716 to facilitate the transportation of tobacco casks from plantations to market centers. Large barrels of tobacco, weighing as much as 1,000 pounds each, were "rolled" to market with the aid of horses, oxen, and slave labor on roads that were scarcely more than unimproved footpaths through forest, barely wide enough to accommodate the casks. By the mid-1700s, "Fredericktown" (now Frederick) to the north was well-established and the route (now Rockville Pike) became a rolling road connecting it to the port of Georgetown where tobacco was shipped to distant markets. The road was one of the longest in the Maryland colony.

Despite the importance of this road, maintenance was poor and mostly consisted of filling in major ruts and holes and clearing obstructions. Efforts to place planks over the ruts were abandoned because of a lack of funds. General Edward Braddock and his aide-de-camp, George Washington, traveled the road in 1755. Its crude condition was cited as a reason for their military defeat at Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh) that year during the French and Indian War. An act of the Maryland Assembly of 1790 was intended to straighten and mend the public roads in the county, including the road from Frederick to Georgetown.[3]

THE TURNPIKE

The need for reliable and passable roads continued to be a problem at the turn of the 19th century. The Washington Turnpike Company was chartered by the Maryland General Assembly in 1805 to try again to improve the road. Turnpikes were based on a "pay as you go" system. Gates, consisting of long poles covered with spikes ("pikes"), were opened only when the toll was paid. The "Rockville Turnpike", as it was known by 1818, became a two-lane roadway "paved" with

[2] *The mid –1700s Pike area was scattered with taverns, including Owens Ordinary, located 16 miles north of Georgetown. Owens Ordinary (1755) was replaced with Hungerford Tavern in 1774.*
[3] *Rockville was part of Frederick County until Montgomery became a separate independent county on September 6, 1776. Rockville was chosen as the county seat but was not called Rockville until 1803.*

small angular stone fragments, ten inches deep over soft dirt and rock. The road became stronger and more compact with use and over time.[4] Guideposts and milestones along the way informed travelers of distances to toll gates and destinations. Twice a week, stage coaches stopped in Rockville carrying passengers and mail along the toll road from Georgetown. Four horses were used to haul the coach as far as Rockville. Two of them continued the journey to Frederick.[5]

The Washington Turnpike Company used revenue collected from tolls for maintenance and repair. The road was heavily used by stagecoaches, herded cattle and sheep, and horses. More damaging traffic such as herds of cattle or horse-drawn carriages were charged higher tolls than pedestrians or single riders. The tolls were abandoned in the 1880s as there was never enough revenue to keep up with the needed repairs.

FIGURE B.2
TOLL RATES ON THE ROCKVILLE PIKE, 1820

ITEM	COST
Per score (20) of sheep or hogs	12 ½ cents
Per score of cattle	25 cents
Horse and rider or led horse	6 ¼ cents
Coach or stage with 2 horses & 4 wheels	25 cents
Carriage with 4 horses	37 ½ cents

Source: Rockville: Portrait of a City, Eileen S. McGuckian, p. 29

Toward the last years of the 19th century, the most extensive road construction in Maryland was the rebuilding of the turnpike between Rockville and Georgetown. According to an 1899 report by the Maryland Geological Survey, "no road in the county was more in need of improvement both on account of its condition and its importance as the direct road from Rockville to Washington. It has long been known as one of the worst pieces of main highway in the state."[6] At that time, there were 835 miles of road in Montgomery County and 95% of them were dirt roads. The remainder were stone and most of them were toll roads.[7]

THE CIVIL WAR ERA

Rockville was a crossroads and camping site for thousands of soldiers, both Union and Confederate, during the Civil War years, 1861-1865. In September 1862, 150,000 troops passed through Rockville and camped at the Fairgrounds (today the Richard Montgomery High School site). The courthouse was used as a temporary hospital for the wounded. The Pike was used heavily for troop movements and was the site of many skirmishes. Union troops scoured for food and horses

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[4] *John L. McAdam, a Scottish engineer who was largely responsible for transforming road building into a science, developed this road construction technology. The term "macadam" came to be applied to a variety of other road surfaces in later years.*
[5] *Mary Deegan Dunham, Rockville: Its History and Its People (1976).*
[6] *1899 Maryland Geological Survey, Volume III, p. 242*
[7] *ibid, p. 241*

among farms that lined the road. During the same era, fugitive slaves followed routes that paralleled the Pike as they followed the Underground Railroad to stops in the county and to freedom in the North.

TRAINS AND TROLLEYS

The coming of the railroad and electric street cars in the late 19th century had a profound effect on the siting of summer resorts and houses in Rockville and along the Pike. Wealthy Washingtonians purchased farmland between Bethesda

The Estate-Bordered Pike

The convenience of the railroad, the trolley, and general road improvements to the Pike around the turn of the century led to the construction of country estates. Prominent houses that once lined the Pike but that are now gone include:

The Tyler –Wheeler Funeral Home (c. 1899), was a 2 ½-story frame, vernacular late Victorian house that was part of the small "Autry Heights" subdivision that was platted c. 1890 to take advantage of the trolley line along the Pike. Only a few houses were ever built there and the residential subdivision gave way to commercial development. The house was demolished in 1959 to allow for expansion of a shopping center.

The Simmons House, at 706 Rockville Pike, was a 2 ½-story Victorian with a wide front porch and was built in 1888-1889 for Rebecca Offutt. It was converted to commercial use in the mid-20th century and served at various times as a tourist home, the Rockville Chamber of Commerce and the Rockville bureau of the Gazette newspapers. The house was considered for local historic designation in 2002, but was found to be ineligible due to extensive alterations.

11520 Rockville Pike, just north of Nicholson Lane and south of Rockville's border, was the site of a large three-story, 14-room wood house built in 1902 for Herman Hollerith, who invented a punch card method for tabulation of the 1890 census and founded the company that later became IBM. The house was purchased in 1926 by Frank Abbo who operated the "Villa Roma Club". It featured dinner, a 14-piece band and dancing. Entertainers included Kate Smith who performed there until the Great Depression brought it to a close and it reverted back to a residence. It then became the "Rainbow Motel" before it was demolished in 1983.

The Sprigg Poole House, 1300 Rockville Pike, was located across from Lyddane-Bradley Farm which was located on the grounds of what is now Woodmont Country Club. This was an unusually large estate type of late Victorian building of frame construction. It was sheathed in German siding and sited on a wooded, landscaped knoll above Rockville Pike along the railroad tracks. A tenant house, smaller in size but built of similar materials, sat directly on the Pike. It was once owned by Sprigg Poole, a prominent county businessman. It was demolished sometime after 1975.

and Rockville around the turn of the 20th century. Only a few that were located along the Pike in Rockville remain from this era, including the Lyddane-Bradley House and outbuildings (now part of Woodmont Country Club) and the Dawson farmhouses (on Copperstone Court), once the homesteads of working farms.

The Metropolitan branch of the B&O Railroad was completed in 1873 and provided passenger train service between Washington, DC and Rockville. While it provided competition for the Pike as a means of travel, it also spurred development and business prosperity in the area by improving access to the greater metropolitan areas of Washington and Baltimore. The 16-mile trip from Rockville to Washington, DC took about 45 minutes.

Although trolleys, or street cars, were found in American cities before the Civil War, a line did not connect Washington, D.C. to Rockville until the turn of the century. The Tenallytown & Rockville Electric Railway Company opened a line from Wisconsin Avenue in Georgetown to Bethesda Park, an amusement destination in Alta Vista (off Old Georgetown Road, near present-day National Institutes of Health) in 1891. The Washington & Rockville (W&R) Electric Railway Company then formed in 1897 to bring street cars as far north as Rockville. By 1900, tracks led to Courthouse Square, but the Mayor and Council of Rockville refused to permit service inside the town to begin until the W&R fulfilled its agreement to build the last section to the western limits of the town. This extension was made through Rockville on Montgomery Avenue to the Woodlawn Hotel (which later became Chestnut Lodge) in 1904.

The agreement between the town of Rockville and the W&R Railway Company lasted for 35 years. From 1900 to 1935, street cars, powered by overhead electric wire, ran on the track from Wisconsin and M Streets, N.W., in the District up Wisconsin and Old Georgetown Roads, over a steel trestle just before the cars approached Georgetown Preparatory School. From there, they continued through

Figure B.3: *Trolley bound for Rockville. Street cars could be driven from either end. Six switching stations and side tracks allowed street cars to pass in different directions. Street cars could reach speeds up to 60 mph but traveled at 12 mph or less in populated areas. Source: Peerless Rockville*

Figure B.4*: The Halpine Store – The Halpine Store, also known as the Lenovitz General Store, was built on the Pike in 1898, taking advantage of the prime location on the trolley and railroad lines and the Pike. The proprietors, Benjamin and Anna Lenovitz, lived on the second floor. The building burned in 1923 and a new fire-resistant brick building was constructed in its place. This building, at 1600 Rockville Pike, became a Radio Shack store. Source: Peerless Rockville*

dense woods at Montrose and onto the Rockville Pike, through Rockville along Montgomery Avenue, to Laird Street, and back again. Major stops along the line included Georgetown, Alta Vista, Bethesda, Montrose, Halpine, the Fairgrounds, Courthouse Square, and ending at Chestnut Lodge.

In 1929, W&R operated 24 trips a day between 6:30 a.m. and 12:30 a.m. to connect Rockville and Washington. However, the successful trolley service was eventually eclipsed by the growing popularity of the automobile and was halted in August 1935.[8]

Figure B.5 *Congressional Plaza sign on Rockville Pike. Source: Peerless Rockville, c. 1960*

POST-WWII SUBURBANIZATION & POPULARITY OF THE AUTOMOBILE

The automobile was introduced and became hugely popular in the early 20th century. The prevalence of automobiles ushered in a new era for the Pike. In 1923, there were 16 service stations and automobile dealers in Rockville.[9] The Pike became a two-lane asphalt-paved road in 1925, but there were no traffic lights between Bethesda and Rockville. Rockville installed the county's first electric traffic signal in 1927 at the intersection of Commerce Lane (West Montgomery Avenue) and Washington Street.

The first automobile speed limit laws were enacted in the U.S. around 1900. In 1905, the speed limit on Rockville roads was six miles per hour according to the book "Rockville: Its history and Its People."

Commercial development on Rockville Pike was contested even in the 1920s. According to a Washington Post article in September 25, 1929, residents along the Pike opposed industrial encroachment on what they claimed was "the most beautiful pike in the country" when Congressional Airport applied for a rezoning of 300 feet of street frontage at Halpine from residential to commercial. According to the Post, "The action of the commissioners in refusing the plea of the aviation field is construed as indicating that the demand of the residents that the Pike be kept free from commercial enterprises so that it might develop as a beautiful residential area is concurred in by the commissioners and to indicate that no such encroachment will be permitted."[10]

Despite the opposition to commercial development, the Pike changed with the emergence of auto-friendly development such as gas stations, car dealerships, tourist cabins, restaurants, and produce stands, though the character remained primarily agricultural through the 1930s. The number of cars owned by Montgomery County residents doubled between 1928 and 1938, totaling 23,600 in 1938.

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[8] *William J. Ellenberger, "History of the Street Car Lines in Montgomery County", The Montgomery County Story, Vol. 17, No. 2 May 1974*
[9] *Fitzgerald's Rockville: A guide to Rockville, Maryland in the 1920s, Eileen McGuckian and Lisa A. Greenhouse, 1996, p.9*
[10] *The Washington Post, "Rezoning Refused on Rockville Pike", September 25, 1929*

Rockville's business center ran east to west from the Rockville Pike through town to Washington Street. The business district, anchored by East Montgomery Avenue, contained a variety of businesses, homes, and places of worship. Properties owned by blacks were segregated from white-owned establishments and segregated along Middle Lane and Washington Street. Montgomery County government facilities and offices associated with public business dominated the center of town.

Figure B.6: *Rockville Pike, just north of the plan study area, at the intersection of Washington Street and the Pike. Photo taken from the top of the GE building in 1988. Source: Peerless Rockville*

Automobiles clogged the narrow streets and parking, though permitted on most streets and behind many commercial buildings, was inadequate by the 1930s. Rockville Pike was widened to four lanes in 1953-55 to relieve the increasing congestion and a bypass was created to separate through traffic from vehicles with a Rockville destination. Rockville Pike no longer jogged west onto Montgomery Avenue, past the courthouse, and north onto Washington Street. Instead, a new 1.4 mile roadway, starting at St. Mary's Church, ran parallel to the railroad tracks northward to bypass the center of town. The bypass opened in 1951 and was named Hungerford Drive a year later. It was successful in diverting traffic away from Rockville's traditional business district on the main street, yet downtown parking remained a significant problem. Cutting off the old main street, the lack of downtown parking, and the emergence of new shopping centers elsewhere in town led to the demise of the town center and the decision to undertake a federal urban renewal program. Forty-six acres in the town center were bought, old and new buildings were demolished, and street patterns were changed. In their place rose the residential Americana Centre, more county buildings, high-rise offices, and Rockville Mall which included a parking garage.

The Pike accommodated 16,650 automobiles per day in 1958.[11] The Washington National Pike Interstate was built that year and later renamed I-270, taking some of the through traffic that the Pike had served. In 1974-75, the Pike was widened again, to six lanes. Between 1975 and 1986, the Pike continued to attract many more shoppers than the town center and approximately 1.8 million square feet of new retail, office, and hotel development was added along the Pike.

Several nightclubs, some with neon signs, sprang up along the Pike in the booming 1950s and 1960s. Some residents saw these as eyesores and City Council-

Parking was a strip shopping center's greatest attraction in the 1950s and 1960s. According to a 1997 article in The Washington Post reflecting on the Pike's history, mid-century strip center owners displayed parking "like a grocer fills windows with fruits and vegetables."

[11] *Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan, April 1989, p. 3. Traffic count in front of Congressional Plaza.*

man Edward Mack called for "Operation De-Uglification" in 1966 to curtail the movement.

The "Car Culture" also brought the area's first McDonald's restaurant, complete with golden arches, to the Pike in the mid-1960s.[12] A McDonald's restaurant is still in the same location at 1390 Rockville Pike but its appearance has changed with the times. Dixie Cream Donuts (later Montgomery Donuts and now a Subway) at 1402 Rockville Pike is another example of small, mid-20th century commercial development along the Pike.

Congressional Airport became Congressional Plaza Shopping Center when its land value increased to a point that made redevelopment financially appealing in the late 1950s. This is a prime example of the evolving importance of automobile-oriented retail along the Pike in the mid-20th century.

Automobile-oriented shopping centers and their expansive parking lots continued to proliferate. A 1997 article in The Washington Post noted that "Humans fit comfortably in this environment only when sealed within their cars. Once drivers become pedestrians, they are vulnerable and out of place, as lost and endangered as someone trying to cross a busy airport tarmac."[13]

Watergate Fame: During the Senate Watergate hearings, conspirator James McCord said he received his orders to burglarize the Democratic National Committee Headquarters at a phone booth outside the Blue Fountain Inn on Rt. 355, about 1.5 miles north of the Rockville depot.

BUS AND RAPID RAIL SERVICE

Bus service had begun in 1924 and, together with private automobiles, replaced the trolleys. The Blue Ridge Transportation Company provided bus service for Rockville and Montgomery County from 1924 through 1955. In 1955, DC Transit Systems acquired the assets of the former Capital Traction Company including street car and bus service. DC transit eliminated the last streetcar service in 1962 but continued to provide transit bus service in the District of Columbia and Montgomery County, including Rockville, until 1973 when it was, in turn, acquired by the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (WMATA). Metrorail Red Line service to Rockville began in 1984.

WMATA's Metrobus service was augmented by Montgomery County's Ride-On bus service starting in 1979. The Rockville and Twinbrook Metrorail stations began service on December 15, 1984. MARC, Maryland's Rail Commuter service, began serving Rockville in 1984 with its Brunswick line. From Rockville, MARC provides service to Union Station in Washington D.C. (southbound) and to Frederick and Martinsburg, WV (northbound), as well as intermediate points. With these public transit improvements, free-standing office buildings and mixed-use development began to join the automobile-oriented strip retail centers along the Pike.

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[12] *An attorney representing McDonald's requested an interpretation of the City's sign regulations as they pertained to the illumination of the restaurant's trademark golden arches; however, the City did not grant an exception to the regulations. Rockville Mayor and Council minutes, December 8, 1959.*
[13] *The Washington Post, "Taking a Peak at the Pike," December 26, 1997*

Congressional Airport

In operation 1929-1958, this airport was the only private airfield in Montgomery County as well as one of the first and busiest private flying fields in the Washington area. In 1928, 275 acres of farmland (previously the Wagner Farm) were leased to the Congressional School of Aeronautics and private airport. In 1929, the lease was converted to a sale and the land was deeded to Arthur Hyde, President of Congressional Airport for $30,000. There were about 65 aircraft at Congressional at any given time, many of which were privately owned. Pilots had to fly over the high tension wires along the Pike to land on the single grass landing strip.

Aviation became popularized in the time period between World War I and World War II and this period became known as the "Golden Age of Aviation". In August 1942, all civilian airports in the Eastern Vital Defense Zone were closed by order of the First Fighter Command. Flying was halted for three years during the War. A brief post-war flying boom collapsed in the early 1950s. Warehouses were built and leased out to earn revenue and flying became an incidental activity at the site. The flying school closed for good in 1951. The Congressional Roller Skating Rink opened in one of the aircraft hangars in 1957 and was very popular but it was demolished in 1984 to make room for a new hotel and restaurant. The Womack Building (131 Congressional Lane) is the only remaining remnant of the airport.

Congressional Plaza was built on the airport site by Arthur Hyde in 1958 in response to the population and housing boom in Rockville and the increasing retail value of the land following World War II. It was one of the first retail developments of its size and kind in Montgomery County. A similar shopping center in Silver Spring was the first in the county, built in 1939 and Wheaton Plaza opened in 1960, or at about the same time as Congressional. These are among the first regional shopping centers constructed outside of urban town centers. However, Congressional was the first alternative to traditional downtown shopping in Rockville. The shopping center was originally conceived as a 30-acre site on the west side of Rockville Pike south of Woodmont Country Club and was to be named Congressional Shopping City. The City of Rockville only approved the central 20 acres for retail development in 1956. It became known instead as Congressional Plaza and was anchored by J.C. Penney (Rockville's first national chain clothing store), Giant Food and S.S. Kresge Company.

The shopping center was designed as a one-story strip of shops in an "L" shape with approximately 35 stores. Anchor stores were accentuated by being slightly taller. The exteriors were comprised of brick with fieldstone facing and plate glass display windows and flat roofs with deep overhangs. The buildings were set far back from the Pike with a vast expanse of surface parking separating them from the Pike. There have been alterations and additions over the years and new clusters of buildings have been added to the north and south of the original center.

Parking and signage were immediate problems for the shopping center. The parking spaces and access lanes were too narrow to accommodate the average 1950s 7.5-foot wide car and had to be re-designed, resulting in fewer spaces. Initially, signage also did not meet City regulations.

Big Box Retail: Rockville gained national attention in 2000 when it enacted limitations on the sizes of individual retail stores following the construction of "big box" retailers Marlo Furniture and Best Buy on the Pike in the mid- and late 1990s.

Figure B7: Aerial view of Metrorail construction adjacent to the Pike, November 1979. Source: Peerless Rockville

THE ROCKVILLE PIKE CORRIDOR NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN, 1989

By the mid-1980s, downzoning was viewed as the solution to traffic congestion and commercial overdevelopment of the Pike. A Rockville Pike Advisory Committee (RPAC) was formed to continue the work of the Economics Amenities Committee (that had been established by the Mayor and Council in 1982 to examine the function and appearance of the Pike) and a temporary building moratorium went into effect in 1984 to temporarily reduce pressures for intense office development along the Pike following the opening of the Metrorail red line stations in Rockville. The Committee presented a series of recommendations to the Mayor and Council in 1985, including a reduction in Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and the creation of an optional method of development that would provide performance standards for increased density in mixed-use projects.

The RPAC also recommended a comprehensive plan for the corridor that would focus on urban design and transportation system management strategies. The Planning Department issued a draft plan based on the recommendations of the RPAC in January 1987. The plan was revised at the direction of the Planning Commission and the Mayor and Council and the final plan was adopted by the Mayor and Council in April 1989 as the Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan. This Plan has provided the guidelines for development and design of the Rockville Pike Corridor for the past 20 years. In 2007, the City determined that an update to the Plan was needed and initiated Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

At this time, the Rockville Pike Plan Area does not contain any locally designated historic sites or any sites on the National Register of Historic Places. Following current City policy, any building or site that is nominated for historic preservation, or proposed for demolition, would require further evaluation to determine its level of significance and whether or not it meets the City's criteria for historic designation.

More information on historic preservation in Rockville may be obtained from the City's Historic Preservation Office or the City's website.