**A Preserve of American Rural Life**

A historic rural neighborhood that stretches briefly along the Potomac River, only ten miles south of the U.S. Capitol, Broad Creek has been a part of agricultural, maritime, and village life in the mid-Atlantic region for more than three centuries. The tiny community is a time capsule containing the footprints of thousands of years of human settlement. It contains:

- Archeological traces of early Native American settlements
- A man-made waterway dating from the colonial era
- A rich and fragile wildlife habitat
- The site of one of Prince George’s County’s first towns
- Important pre-Revolutionary homes
- The founding Anglican (now Episcopal) Church in the Washington area

The Broad Creek estuary which forms the heart of the Historic District lies midway between two Potomac forts: Fort Washington, to the south, dating to the War of 1812, and Fort Foote, to the north, built during the Civil War. The Historic District encompasses a winding mile-long stretch of Livingston Road from the District’s northern entrance at the inter-

**EARLY SETTLEMENT**

Broad Creek’s history includes people of many races and creeds. The abundant wildlife, still a feature of this protected inlet on the Potomac River, attracted a succession of Native Americans from the paleo-Indian period (c. 10,000 B.C.) to the Piscataway Indians who occupied the area in 1608 when Captain John Smith’s explorations reached this part of the Potomac. In the years after the first European settlers arrived in 1634, the Broad Creek area became the home of English planters and shipbuilders, as well as African American laborers and their families. Later, German farmers from Silesia settled in the area. Today the agriculture of this rural neighborhood includes horse breeding and a vineyard.

**TOWN OF AIRE**

In 1662, a patent was granted for a 500-acre tract of land called Battersea. Crops of tobacco were planted and wooden houses and barns were constructed near the river. Recent excavations have revealed the foundations of an early dwelling (c. 1690) marking the oldest archeologically documented house site in the Washington region.

In 1706, Broad Creek was designated by the colonial legislature as the Town of Aire. It served as a tobacco port long before the origins of Georgetown and Alexandria. Records tell of shipbuilding facilities and tobacco warehouses. The port was eventually abandoned as silting made it navigable for ships, and tobacco gave way to other crops.

**HARMONY HALL**

Harmony Hall, an excellent example of a Georgian plantation house erected (c. 1760) on the Battersea tract, stands to this day in a spectacular location overlooking the Potomac. Its symmetrical Flemish bond brick exterior, large center hall with formal staircase, and exceptional interior moldings establish Harmony Hall as Broad Creek’s most important architectural feature. It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
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Harmony Hall was restored in the 1930s by Charles Collins, a man of many talents and careers. Educated as an agriculturist, archeologist, and constitutional lawyer, Collins served as Congressional and Supreme Court librarian in addition to other important federal government positions. Today, Harmony Hall and 60 acres of the original Battersea tract are used as a Morgan sport horse breeding operation.

ST. JOHN’S CHURCH

King George’s Parish (originally called Piscataway Parish) was established in 1692 as one of the thirty original Church of England parishes in Maryland. The first church was built in 1695 on a tract known as Little Hall. The parish came to be known as the “mother church” of many others established in the Washington area. The current brick church building, which replaced earlier frame structures, dates from 1766. St. John’s Church is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

As early as 1723, African Americans were among those attending the church. Walter Dulany Addison, a rector of St. John’s from 1801 until 1809 who publicly opposed slavery, began freeing his own family’s slaves during the 1790s. Although there are no written records of visits to St. John’s Church
by the famous occupant of Mt. Vernon across the river, a pew dedicated to George Washington lends tangible support to the tradition that he frequently crossed the Potomac to accompany Broad Creek friends to services there.

AN EARLY COLONIAL WATERWAY

Few who drive along Livingston Road realize that about 100 yards away is Want Water Canal, a picturesque 1,000 foot-long channel through the Broad Creek estuary. Stories link the name of this waterway and its construction to Thomas Addison, whose gambrel-roofed house (c. 1706) close to the Potomac was called Want Water because of the lack of a navigable channel to provide access to Addison’s tobacco plantation. Want Water Canal was dug long before Federal engineers built the Potomac’s better known historic waterway, the C&O Canal. Evidence of barg walkways, brick paths and colonial-era flowers and plantings mark the path of the canal through the Historic District. The solitary brick end walls of Want Water House stand close to its banks, a romantic ruin with commanding views across the Potomac to Virginia.

SILESIA

Toward the end of the 19th century families from Silesia, Germany, began to settle in the Broad Creek area. Robert Stein arrived in 1875 and purchased Harmony Hall in 1892. Stein was an explorer and linguist who later accompanied Commander Robert Peary on one of his Arctic expeditions to assist in communicating with the Eskimos. Stein encouraged his German relatives to immigrate to Broad Creek. Today, descendants of these settlers continue to farm the area and operate businesses in the community which still bears the name of their homeland.

PISCATAWAY HOUSE

With its steeply pitched gable roof incorporating front and rear porches and its massive freestanding double chimneys, Piscataway House (c. 1730) is a fine example of the tidewater colonial architectural style. To save it from threatened destruction in 1932, Charles Collins moved the house from the village of Piscataway, four miles to the south, to its current site facing the Potomac River at Broad Creek. Piscataway House has recently been augmented with compatible additions and outbuildings.
The dominant modern structure in Broad Creek is Harmony Hall Regional Center, a facility of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Formerly an elementary school, the center offers a variety of recreation and fine arts classes and programs for citizens throughout southern Prince George's County and is the site of the acoustically acclaimed John Addison Concert Hall. Also, monthly meetings of the Broad Creek Historic District Advisory Committee are held at the center.

In 1985, Prince George's County designated Broad Creek as the first historic district to be created under its preservation ordinance. Establishment of a rural historic district means, among other things, that property owners apply to the County Historic Preservation Commission before undertaking projects that might change the appearance of properties within the Historic District.

One example of new construction is Mieza, an American Saddlebred horse farm on the Little Hall tract. A new house was built in the 1990s in the style of a tidewater farmhouse, with a horse barn built to resemble an old tobacco shed. Plans for these two buildings were reviewed by the Historic Preserv-
tion Commission before they were constructed.

Tax incentives for preserving old structures and for building compatible new ones are available through the Historic Preservation Commission. The Commission, assisted by the Historic District Advisory Committee, maintains guidelines to preserve the rural character of the Historic District. For more information, contact Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission at (301) 952-3520 or TTY (301) 292-8203 (for hearing impaired).

DIRECTIONS

To reach the Broad Creek Historic District take Indian Head Highway (Maryland Route 210) from the Capital Beltway (I-95) at Exit 2A or 3A just East of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge over the Potomac River, and proceed South three miles (see Map).