

Heritage Area Mythbusters Talk
“The Older the Better, What Exaggerations Tell Us about Annapolis’s History”

Workshop at Historic London Town
18 November 2008

Slide 1 What to believe: Newspaper? Bronze plaque? Sign? Post card?
Annapolis myths and legends can lurk anywhere. Not just in books and magazines or oral history. And it’s interesting to see where they turn up, and when. Often a myth includes some fact — maybe even a lot of fact. But the way those facts are applied or grouped can create an impression that is arguable or, in some cases, just not true. Sometimes investigation reveals that a legend was fiction from the beginning.

2 The Capital Masthead, 20 October 2008

For many years, the city’s only consistent daily newspaper has advertised with great pride its heritage, which, were you to believe this masthead, dates from 1727.

As far as we know, the first newspaper in Annapolis was established in 1727 by William Parks. He named it the *Maryland Gazette* and published it weekly until 1734 with some gaps. Then he settled permanently in Williamsburg, where he was publishing the *Virginia Gazette*.

3 *Maryland Gazette* 26 April 1745 No 1

Eleven years later, the new printer to the Province of Md, Jonas Green, decided it was time to revive the *Maryland Gazette*. But did he consider his paper a continuation of Parks’s?

Here you can see that Green terms this 26 April 1745 edition as volume No 1. This is the first extant paper of his run. Had Jonas Green thought of his paper as a continuation of Parks’s, logic would have made this volume 8, not volume 1.

The Green family, Jonas, his widow Anne Catharine, his sons William, Frederick, and Samuel, and his grandson Jonas II published the *Maryland Gazette* with only a few breaks (during the Stamp Act crisis and again for 2 years during the Revolution when paper was so scarce) until December 1839, which was Volume 94.

[A very good source for the early *Maryland Gazette* is Lawrence C. Wroth, *A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland, 1686–1776*, online at MSA SC 2731]

4 *Maryland Gazette* office (2008)

In a scenario that seems familiar today, Jonas II reached beyond the newspaper and printing business into other financial endeavors — such as real estate. He lost his shirt. And his newspaper.

This building on the corner of State Circle and East St., built by Jonas II in the 1830s, but now much modified, was the last office of his family’s *Maryland Gazette* and the gamble that helped send him into bankruptcy.

In *The Ancient City*, published in 1887, Elihu Riley stated firmly (pages 324–325) that the oldest paper in town is *Maryland Republican*, established in 1809. Elihu's father published it with various partners from 1842 to 1867 and Elihu Jr. was a partner in ownership briefly in 1867. [So we can assume that he knew his Annapolis newspapers.]

So, why does *The Capital* think it is in its 282nd year? The link seems to a newspaper begun fifteen years after the death of the Greens' *Maryland Gazette*.

5 *Annapolis Gazette* 28 September 1854

In 1854, 2 Annapolis men established a new weekly called the *Annapolis Gazette*. This is their first issue, Volume 1 No. 1.

6 *Annapolis Gazette* 12 October 1854 Vol. 1, No 3

The paper was too wide to get it all on my scanner, so here's the one from two weeks later, folded to show both Vol. and No.

The *Annapolis Gazette* was sold just after the Civil War, but the new owner continued the volume numbers in sequence.

In 1868, a man named James Guest King bought the business. His first edition carries both the old volume number: XIV (14) and his new one Vol 1, No. 1. King is ambivalent about the idea of continuation, and over the next two years he changes the type on the banner several times and plays around with the Volume numbers. It seems that he is focused on portraying the city (and his newspaper) as new, modern, and right up there with the excitement of the post-war period. Not all of his issues survive, but the ones that do are on microfilm at the Maryland State Archives.

7 *Annapolis Gazette* 27 December 1870

Here King has decided on a Vol. number of 24, which would put the date of the paper's beginning at about 1846. This seems to have been arbitrary.

8 *Annapolis Gazette* 31 January 1871

The next extant issue is just a month later, and — surprise! — the *Annapolis Gazette* is now 125 years old, giving it a birth date of — 1746.. Apparently history is now fashionable. Or perhaps, King just gave up his attempt to bring the city up to date. King continued his paper as the *Annapolis Gazette* through at least November 1874, and then abruptly changed the name to *Maryland Gazette*. King's new focus on the benefit of seeing his paper, and by extension his city, as having an ancient heritage pre-dates the 1876 Centennial, which is the usual date chosen to explain that era's emphasis on the importance of history.

But King didn't fool Elihu Riley, who says (*The Ancient City*, page 325): "The *Maryland Gazette*, established as the *Annapolis Gazette*, some years after the death of the original *Gazette*, is a weekly paper, published by J. Guest King." [Riley knew his newspapers.]

King sold the *Maryland Gazette* in the late 1880s, and the new owner continued to see advantages in a newspaper that claimed a place in colonial history and maintained the myth. When the publishers of the *Evening Capital*, established in 1884, bought the *Maryland Gazette* in 1910, they immediately added a line to their banner proclaiming the *Maryland Gazette*, established 1745. One month later, they decided to go whole hog and changed 1745 to 1727. The older the better!

Which is how today's *The Capital*, direct descendent of the *Evening Capital*, can boast that it dates from 1727.

There are two investigations of the genealogy of the *Evening Capital*:

1. Helen Van Walt, "The Torch of Freedom, A History of the Maryland Gazette" (MSA SC 2819; M 530), maintains that through transfers of equipment or publisher or publication site or just the name itself, the *Maryland Gazette*, published by the Capital Gazette Press when she wrote her history sometime in the 1950s, is a direct descendent of Jonas Green's *Maryland Gazette*.

2. In a history of the newspaper titled "Whatever Happened to the *Maryland Gazette*?" (prepared for Philip Merrill, typescript, November 1974), I disagree with the modern connection to the Greens' paper. [But as I did research for this talk, I found errors in my paper that I will have to correct before releasing it.]

9 Jonas Green House, photo by Deering Davis, c.1947*

So, if you can not always rely on what's in the newspaper, what about bronze plaques? The Greens' *Maryland Gazette* was published in or behind this house, on Charles St., from 1745 until after the Revolution. But was the house built in 1690 as stated here?

Marcia Miller and Orlando Ridout V in *Architecture in Annapolis, A Field Guide* (prepared for the Maryland Historical Trust, 1998, page 80), which is generally your most reliable source for building dates and architecture, date the house to about 1740. Certainly it was not built by the young newlywed Jonas Green, who came to Annapolis from Philadelphia in 1738 as printer to the Province. My theory is that Dr. Charles Carroll built the house as an inducement for Jonas and Anne Catharine to settle here. Carroll and others owned the property until 1770, when Anne Catharine finally got title to her house.

* This photo appeared in Deering Davis, *Annapolis Houses, 1700–1775* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1947).

10 Plaque on Green House (2008)

Nonetheless, here is the plaque placed on the house in 1932, adding yet another decade to its age by giving a construction date of c.1680.

11 211 Prince George Street (2008)

This house on Prince George Street also carried a plaque, now removed by some truthful soul. Nonetheless, it still appears in books published within the last 10 years as the house where Governor Francis Nicholson lived during his time in Annapolis. It is also made the site of General Assembly sessions and/or the storehouse of provincial

records, depending on who's telling the story.

The culprit here was David Ridgely, whose 1841 *Annals of Annapolis* described Nicholson's residence and footnoted his text with a comment that the house in question was owned by a man named GG Brewer.

12 211 Prince George 1900 (MSA SC 985-1-130)

Ridgely's nephew, Elihu Riley, who relied heavily on his uncle's book in his own *The Ancient City*, 1887, takes the identification several steps further by describing the c.1695 house (p. 302) as "well preserved evidence of the taste and solidity of the architecture of that interesting period. To this house a few years since an addition was made on the right wing. The outlines and proportions of the ancient building are readily discerned."

Anyone familiar with colonial architecture will undoubtedly agree with Miller and Ridout (*Architecture in Annapolis*, p. 47) that the building was constructed shortly before the Revolution.

13 Reverse of previous photo, labeled "Marchand House"

Yet, someone who believed Riley typed this description of the house's importance and stuck it on the back of that 1900 photo. Here Major Edward Dorsey's house is given a construction date of 1685.

14 - Stoddert map, 1718 (MSA SC 1477-1-6)

Major Edward Dorsey did build a 40-foot brick house sometime before the arrival of Gov. Nicholson and the government in Annapolis in 1695.

But Dorsey's land lay to the north of the hill Nicholson chose for his State House, on lot 75. Admiral Harry W. Hill, researching the silver service made for the USS *Maryland*, exposed the error in *Maryland's Colonial Charm Portrayed in Silver* (privately printed, 1938). [Vice Adm. Harry W. Hill was superintendent of the USNA 28 April 1950 to 4 Aug 1952. (Jack Sweetman, *The U. S. Naval Academy, An Illustrated History* (Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1995), page 270. Hill graduated from the USNA in 1911 (page 208).]

15 Annapolis Lot Histories, Parcel 9, Lot 75*

When I did this section of the Lot Histories, I believed Hill was correct, but I said that it wasn't proved. Thanks to the careful research of Tony Lindauer, however, there can be little doubt now that the brick house where Nicholson stayed from 1695 to 1699, was here on Lot 75, probably on section A, near the corner of College Ave and North St., and now under the Legislative Services building. [See Anthony D. Lindauer, *From Paths to Plats* (Annapolis: Maryland State Archives and Maryland Historical Trust, 1997), page 12. For more on Dorsey's house and Nicholson, see also Edward C. Papenfuse, "*Doing good to posterity*" (Annapolis: Maryland State Archives and Maryland Historical Trust, 1995)

*Source for this map is Edward C. Papenfuse and Jane W. McWilliams, "Appendix F: Lot Histories and Maps," (1971), Final Report, "Southern Urban Society After the Revolution: Annapolis, Maryland, 1782-1784," National Endowment for the Humanities Grant H 69-0-178.

16 1907 Liberty Tree plaque

Here's another bronze plaque that has led people astray since it was placed in 1907. The huge and venerable tree that once stood on St. John's College's front campus (continued with next image)

17 Liberty Tree photo 1952 (MSA SC 1890-28)

probably was the site of pre-Revolutionary meetings. In October 1775, Governor Robert Eden wrote home to England about his clever marshaling of reasonable men who "they made a Point of being present at the meeting under the Liberty Tree, and with Spirit, Resolution and threats of force, totally overset a mad-headed Scheme, set on foot by only eight or nine very worthless idle Fellows." (Eden to Lord Dartmouth this date "Correspondence of Governor Eden," *MHM* 2 (1907): 100) The "worthless idle Fellows" were determined to run out of town anyone who did not sign the Association of Freeman of Maryland, recently passed by the 5th Extralegal Convention. The fact that Eden refers to a Liberty Tree suggests that it had seen prior use. It may even have seen meetings of Stamp Act opponents a decade before, although the only mention I've found of a location for the meetings of the Sons of Liberty, puts them in the State House in March of 1766. (*Maryland Gazette* 6 March 1766)

But the plaque doesn't make either of those claims. What it does say is the that the first Treaty made with the Susquehannock Indians in 1652 was made in that location.

Considering that:

1. Thomas Todd, first owner of this part of the Annapolis peninsula, had lived on the land maybe 2 years in 1652 and could not possibly have cleared it all by that time; AND
2. The base of Puritan operations in 1652 was across the Severn on Greenbury Point, where they had built their meeting house; AND
3. This tree was found to be about 400 years old in 1999, making it only about 50 years old in 1652, and a 50-year-old tulip poplar would not stand out in the forest of 1652; AND
4. This tree was not near the shoreline where Indians and others would be likely to land;

I don't believe that this is where that important treaty was signed by members of the band of Virginia Independents who settled on the Severn just a year or so earlier.

18 Liberty Tree plaques (2008)

The much-beloved Liberty Tree was fatally damaged in Hurricane Floyd in September 1999. Today there are two plaques. The newer one hedges a bit and can be relied upon.

19 New tree (2008)

This is the new tree growing on the site of the old one.

20 2007 plaque for new Liberty Tree

With its own plaque

21 McDowell Hall (2008)

And here again the central building of St. John's College, begun as a home for the province's governors under Thomas Bladen in 1744, deserted while still incomplete, and offered to the new college by the General Assembly in the law that chartered the college in 1784. Visitors and Governors of the new college accepted the challenge of finishing the huge structure as a combination classroom and living quarters for students and faculty. The college opened on 11 November 1789, 219 years ago.

22 St. John's College sign on College Avenue (2008)

So why does this sign at the foot of the main entrance to McDowell Hall say the college was "Founded 1696" as King William's School?

King William's School was the grammar school established in 1696 under the auspices of Governor Francis Nicholson, a great believer in education. Nicholson had already promoted the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. But we here in Maryland got only a free school for boys who might, if they did well and had financial backing, attend the Williamsburg college.

Some two years after the legislation establishing St. John's, the trustees of King William's School petitioned the Assembly for permission to combine the two schools in some way for the benefit of both. Eventually some books and other property were transferred to the college and the master of the free school later became a tutor. The boys who would have gone to the free school now attended the grammar school program at St. John's.

It didn't occur to me until I was putting this together with the *Maryland Gazette* myth that just as something in the immediate post-Civil War period prompted J. Guest King to suddenly add a hundred years to the age of the *Annapolis Gazette*, perhaps the same impulse prompted the board of St. John's to make the new claim that the college was "a continuation and enlargement of an earlier institution of learning." (1868 board report, quoted in Tench Francis Tilghman, *The Early History of St. John's College in Annapolis*

(Annapolis, Md.: The St. John's College Press, 1984), p. 186.)

From that, it was only a short step to the assertion by college President Thomas Fell in 1892 that St. John's "traces its foundation to the year 1696 when it was first established as King William's School.

The myth was debunked in very nice detail by Tilghman, in his *The Early History of St. John's College*, which was published in 1984, but written in the late 1930s.

Even though the alumni celebrated the 100th anniversary of their alma mater in 1889 (1789 to 1889), the idea of age remained attractive. By 1941, when Tilghman was explaining the myth of 1696 in his appendix, this sign (or its predecessor) was in place at the corner of King George and College Ave.

Other standard sources for the history of St. John's College are: Emily A. Murphy, "*A Complete & Generous Education*": *300 Years of Liberal Arts, St. John's College, Annapolis* (Annapolis, Md.: St. John's College Press, 1996) and the series of articles written by Charlotte Fletcher in the *Maryland Historical Magazine*, volumes 74, 78, 80, 81, and 84, and collected as "St. John's 'For ever': Five essays on the History of King William's School and

St. John's College," in *The St. John's Review* 60 (1990–91). Fletcher's version of the connection between the two schools is "How King William's School Became St. John's College." *Maryland Historical Magazine* 91 (1996).

23 McDowell Hall (2008)

McDowell Hall figures in one of the most outrageous postcard claims I've seen.

24 "Dancing in the Great Hall" postcard

Emily Peake shared this with me. It is a modern card, printed within the last 40 years. The dancing students were captured by a well-known local photographer. I don't know why they are so beautifully costumed. Perhaps for one of the Revolutionary bicentennial commemorations. Charming. Until you flip the card over to see

25 Reverse of previous card

That this is the Great Hall of St. John's College, "built 1696," described by a quote from William Eddis's 1770 description of the Assembly Rooms on Duke of Gloucester St. The disconnect here is truly magnificent.

26 Carvel Hall post card

Emily has shared also two special post cards depicting the part of that now-demolished hotel that faced Prince George Street and was once the home of William Paca. Here we see it described as the "oldest house in Annapolis," "built about 1770," a house in which George and Martha Washington danced. Of all the occasions that George visited Annapolis, both before and after the Revolution, I can not find one in which Martha accompanied him. George may have danced, but not with his wife and probably not in this house, which is, by the way, was begun in 1765, and is not the oldest house in town.

27 Carvel Hall post card

And here again is William Paca's fine house, now built in the 16th Century. No doubt by those Susquehannocks.

What all these myths tell us is that history sells — the older the better — even into absurdity.