

THE FISCHER FAMILY OF  
BALTIMORE COUNTY, MARYLAND:  
A PICTURE OF THE LIFE OF A GERMAN-AMERICAN  
FAMILY  
IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

*In 1990, Rudolph F. Fischer, Sr. finished writing his recollections from childhood. Although Mr. Fischer intended his narrative solely for his family, the story he tells will likely appeal to many. He focuses on his own experiences yet recounts a virtual chronicle of life in rural Baltimore County in the early twentieth century.*

*Mr. Fischer is now deceased, but his son, Rudolph, Jr., has graciously consented to the publication of his father's narrative in the **Report**. The story is presented largely as Mr. Fischer wrote it. Some explicit references to family members have been omitted, and several notes and illustrations have been added to make the whole accessible to a wider audience, particularly those who might not be intimately familiar with the geography of Baltimore City and County (Ed.).*

In June, 1896, my grandfather, Friedrich J. Fischer, purchased four acres, one rood and eight perches<sup>1</sup> of land on the north side of Bird River Neck Road from James J. Milling. He paid \$40.00 per acre or a total price of \$172.00.

Grandfather Fischer had recently arrived in America from Germany, where he was born in 1842. With the help of four of his six sons, also born in Germany, Friedrich Fischer proceeded to build a single-room, one-and-one-half-story log cabin with a tin roof on the land he had purchased. Three of his sons purchased adjoining land and also built log cabins. They then proceeded to clear the land for farming. I still have in my possession the broad axe which was used in hewing the logs. My father, Friedrich (Frederick) Barnabas Fischer, was born in 1880. As a young man, he attended Orem's public school in Middle River to learn the English language. Sarah Pielert was his teacher. He was granted American citizenship by the Baltimore County Circuit Court on September 3, 1901, when he reached the age of twenty-one. Part of the document which confirmed his new status

stated: "having declared an oath taken in open court his intentions to become a citizen of the United States and that he doth absolutely renounce all allegiance and fidelity to the Emperor of Germany of whom he was heretofore a subject."

In 1905 my father returned to his native village of Wierau in Saxony to bring Hedwig Louise Kunde, a village girl, back to America as his betrothed. They wed on November 12 that year in Maryland. Hedwig's passport indicates her occupation as a seamstress. I was born on September 19, 1906; my brother Herbert was born in 1908. We were both born in the homestead on Bird River Neck Road in Baltimore County, which by that time had been enlarged.

My grandfather's six sons all came to America with him. At that time in Germany all young men had to serve in the military. Since my grandfather did not agree with compulsory military service, he decided to bring his family to America. His daughter, Lydia, remained in Germany. Three of the brothers, Martin, Johannes (John) and Edmund hitchhiked to California to seek their fortune. Later Edmund and John

returned to Baltimore County to begin farming the land. Martin stayed in Anaheim, California, and planted an orange grove. He never returned to the east coast, even for a visit. His land is now part of the Disneyland complex. When we visited Martin's family in 1955, after his death, his wife, my Aunt Lydia, related to us his experiences while traveling west. The brothers passed through New Orleans, where they took a job unloading banana boats and lived on a diet of bananas. For the rest of his life, Martin could not stand the sight of a banana. We were in California on the day that Disneyland opened and were among the first one-hundred paying customers.

In all, five of my grandfather's six brothers made Baltimore Country their home. Edmund and John were farmers, supplying fruits and vegetables to Baltimore market. Brother Ernst settled in the Stemmers Run area and proceeded to grow flowers for cutting. His specialty was sweet peas, and he gained some national renown as a grower and propagator of them. He carried his flowers in large shoulder baskets to the Baltimore market by train. In the early 1900's, Uncle Ernst gave father some red rose bushes which he planted on the front lawn of our home. Uncle Ernst probably received them from his friend, Mr. Cook, who was a rose grower of national renown. When Marie and I were married and moved into our home at 8805 Harford Road, we brought them with us. They are now growing in the two beds behind the house.

They have the fragrance of old-time roses, but the blooms are very short-lived. Much later, Uncle Ernst's property was purchased by Baltimore County as a flood plain project, and the buildings were removed. His descendants moved the business to Jericho Road, adjacent to the covered bridge

in Upper Falls. There, they continue to grow cut flowers, shipping to the Washington market daily. Their flowers have been used in the White House for many years.

Brother Paul brought with him from Germany seeds for a highly scented variety of violets. He grew these violets in an extensive system of hot beds for the Baltimore market. During the colder weather the hot beds were covered with straw mats which he wove for the purpose. In the early spring, when the violets came into bloom, their scent could be detected a long distance away. To this day, the scent of violets is a memory of springtime for me.

My father, Friedrich, was the youngest of the brothers and made his living as a country carpenter. He inherited the family homestead, which I still own.

For over forty years the Fischer brothers played cards several times a week at Uncle Paul's house. They played *Skat*—the German national card game—using special cards of German design. Kernels of corn were used as markers.

## **THE BIRD RIVER AREA IN THE EARLY DAYS**

### **DAILY LIFE**

Our home had a rear wing of log construction with a corrugated tin roof, which was original. A two-story front building was added later. The new building had two rooms down and two rooms up and was of very light construction. It had no central heating. We lived in the rear wing with its log construction. It had a wood burning stove for heating and cooking and a dining table. The logs were covered with wainscoting inside and German siding outside. The rooms in both wings were lined with wallpaper, which served to keep the outside air from blowing into the rooms.

We always had a problem with roaches in the walls, and there was no way to get at them. Every few weeks mother would close off the room and spread Black Flag roach powder, but in a few days another new generation would be there. The floor sloped at least six inches to the rear, probably because the logs were rotting. In one corner was a tin bathtub with a removable cover, which served as our seat at the dining table. A kerosene lamp was hung over the table, and it always leaked kerosene. When we did our homework, we wrapped a cloth under it to soak up the kerosene. The lamp was an "Angle" lamp.

There was no electricity, running water, or telephone. Our nearest phone was at Uncle Ernst's home in Stemmer's Run. A bucket of water sat on a low shelf in the kitchen with a dipper hung alongside it. This served for drinking and kitchen water.

The wooden privy was across the yard. A wooden commode was kept in the house for people who were unable to go out. Newspaper or old Sears and Roebuck catalogs were used for toilet paper. Until I was about the age of fourteen, we slept in the low-ceilinged room over the kitchen. I can still hear the rain falling on the tin roof. Later on, after my brother Herbert's death, I moved to the far upstairs room and used it until I married. Marie and I lived there for a few months until we moved into our new home. There was no heat, and the room was just as cold as the outdoors. I often found the bed covered with snow that had drifted through the window. There were very thick feather blankets, and mother would place a warming bottle in the bed before I went up. Once I had settled in, it became comfortable. In the early years we slept on a mattress filled with corn husks. They were lumpy and rustled loudly when we moved.

Our living room was next to the kitchen, and we used a portable kerosene heater for heat. It threw a very pretty pattern of light on the ceiling, but the whole room smelled of kerosene and carbon monoxide went up to sickening levels. We never used the other room on the first floor after my Grandfather died. For awhile, father occasionally sold bicycle accessories there, but the business never really amounted to anything. The original structure was torn down in 1933.

One of my jobs was to split and store the firewood for the kitchen stove. In the winter mother would be the first one up. She would start the fire, and when the room was warm and breakfast was ready, she would call us and we would rush down and dress in the kitchen.

Prior to 1916, our standard of living would probably have been considered at poverty level by today's standards. However, despite a lack of money, there was usually enough wholesome food to put on the table due to hard work and foresight. I remember the long walk with my mother to the streetcar line at Middle River in order to go shopping in Highlandtown. We would then walk back home with her loaded, black mesh shopping bag. It was over a two-mile walk, each way. Mother purchased our beef supplies from Mr. Hammond, a butcher from Upper Falls. He wore a black derby hat and drove a one-horse wagon containing large sides of beef. The meat was covered with a white sheet to keep out flies and dust. Mother would select the cuts of beef that she wanted and then Mr. Hammond would cut off the amount of meat that she needed. The wagon was on the road all day, and the meat was not refrigerated or iced down. Yet I can recall no problems caused by spoiled meat. At hog-butcher time, the brothers

made sausage, smoked hams and generally shared the meat among themselves. Very little food was store-bought. We had a cow for milk and butter, chickens, a vegetable garden and apple trees. Vegetables were preserved for use in the winter and a winter's supply of potatoes and apples were stored in large bins in the basement. No one had to go hungry.

There were no movies, TV, radios, auto rides, soft drinks, or iced drinks. Ice cream was limited to a cone at the annual Sunday School picnic. I remember one Christmas when my only present was a small chocolate bar with the promise of more gifts later if the money became available. When I was about fifteen we did have a small wind-up gramophone with about six records. Some people had player pianos, but we could not afford one. We did have a hand-me-down, foot-powered organ with a round stool. We still have the stool in use today. The organ was later given to Uncle Edmund. Uncle Paul also had an organ, and every Sunday night my cousin Lena would play hymns on it and sing. We thought it sounded very nice.

About 1925, a friend of Father's built a single tube radio for him for \$5.00. We installed it with a long outside antenna. Sometimes we could hear station KDKA in Pittsburg, but it was very faint. This was almost unbelievable; the neighbors would come to our house to hear it. Later we got an Atwater Kent receiver with a seashell mounted on the Statue of Liberty as a speaker. I think the radio is still in the attic at Bird River Road.

Older people generally lived close to their children and they were expected to make themselves useful to the best of their ability. In most cases this worked out reasonably well with benefits to all members of the family. We never seemed to lack for

things to do, largely because there was always work to be done. People who were really indigent, with no family for support were sent to the County almshouse (we called it the poorhouse) in Cockeysville. There they were again expected to work to the best of their ability, no matter what their age. The women worked at housekeeping and taking care of the sick and infirm. The men performed chores such as grounds keeping and gardening. No social workers were needed to entertain them.

One of the exciting events of the times was seeing blazes at night. They could be seen twenty miles or more away and they happened rather frequently. People would gather and speculate on the location of the blaze and whether it was a house, a barn or a woods fire. Often we would go looking for the location of the blaze. When fires reached such a large stage, neighbors would come from all around to rescue people, possessions and livestock. They would also try to save adjoining buildings with bucket brigades, but it was usually impossible to save buildings already on fire. Other frequent types of fires in our neighborhood were the marsh and woods fires. They sometimes burned for many hours. My father was an unpaid State forest warden and he had the authority to hire people to fight such fires.

There was some crime in the community. One night father was coming home from work and was held up by two men who stole money. Several days later, policemen from Highlandtown, Baltimore County (where they had a small police force) arrested the two men in an abandoned shack. They were put on trial and received jail terms of five years each. We also had a bicycle stolen from our barn and there were other robberies in the neighborhood. Father purchased a small revolver and kept it near

his bed at night. Mother was terrified that he would use it, but he never did.

When I was a boy there were no income taxes of any kind, no social security taxes or sales tax; the only taxes were Baltimore County real estate taxes. As a rule people did not feel that they were overtaxed by the County although the County provided very little in public services, mainly the public schools and a modest road maintenance program. There were no paid fire companies, and I didn't see a County policeman until about 1920. There were County constables who served as a sort of legal officer in the community and who would listen to citizen's complaints. They served on a part-time basis. I suppose that there was a county sheriff, but we never saw him. People who lived within the law never came into contact with a County, State, or Federal official. The only exception was when we had business with the Post Office Department. A rural free delivery service (RFD) was provided. Rural Free Delivery was established by Congress in 1896. The mailman traveled in a horse drawn mail-wagon and delivered the mail to each box on his route. There were no local banks in our area and very few people were familiar with checks as an item of exchange. The mailman sold money orders, which were used for purchases.

People who held public office were, as a rule, poorly paid, but they usually held a career position with some retirement benefits. These people were looked upon in the community with respect. Mechanics who worked in government installations such as the Navy Yard in Washington and shipyards were considered tops in their fields. These places had high standards of workmanship, and people who worked there were accorded considerable respect. Generally people

who were employed worked long hours at poor pay. However, they were grateful for work to support their families on an existence level. There were no unions. People seemed to be happy that they lived in a country of unlimited opportunity and that they could better themselves by individual effort.

#### CLOTHING

Up until World War I, many men wore hard, black derby hats. I can vividly remember my father wearing one. Boys and some men wore cloth caps. For very formal wear, men wore high, flat-top, black silk hats. Both younger and older men wore felt hats in the colder months. They expressed their individuality by creasing the brim in a certain way. The brim was sometimes turned up in the back and down in the front (a conservative statement); others would wear their felt hats with the brim turned down all around (devil may care) or just on one side. In the summer we would wear hard straw hats with a low flat crown. The brim had a silk band around it. On May 15, I believe, felt hats were considered to be out of season. If you forgot and went out wearing a felt hat, someone was sure to bash you on top of your head and drive the hat down around your ears.

During the summer smaller children spent most of their time playing outdoors in their bare feet. My mother only permitted us this luxury after the second thunderstorm of the spring. We were also required to pick up all the broken glass and other sharp objects were in the yard first. At dusk, Mother would put a wash basin and towel on an outdoor bench where we would wash. Shortly thereafter we went to bed. There were no indoor plumbing facilities.

I cannot recall having store-bought clothes during my early years. Mother always made them at home on her treadle sewing machine. During the 1930s, the manufacturers of chicken and cattle feeds shipped their grain in large sacks made of good quality cotton fabric which were printed with color designs. These feed sacks were much in demand among the farm women, who sewed them into dresses, underwear and other garments.

#### LAUNDRY

Monday was wash day all over the city and county. Clothes hung out to dry could be seen everywhere. A large oblong copper kettle called a wash boiler (about one foot high) was placed on a wood-burning stove. It was long enough to cover two stove plates. It was filled with water and the dirty clothes were placed in it. Homemade brown soap was then pared off the bar with a knife into the water. This all was brought to a boil and stirred with a short piece of broomstick. After boiling, the clothes were dipped out with the stick and hand scrubbed on a wooden washboard. The clothes were then placed into a wooden washtub for rinsing. Starch and scents were added and the clothes were either wrung out by hand or put through a hand-operated wringer clamped to the side of the tub. Then they were hung outdoors on a wire line for drying. If the outdoor weather was not suitable for drying clothes, then they were hung on temporary lines in the kitchen. After they were dry, the clothes were ironed with heavy irons that were on the kitchen stove. Some houses had summer kitchens to keep the stove heat out of the main house during the summertime.

#### BAKING

At Christmas time mother would bake *Stollen* and *Pfeffernüsse* (small, round, hard

cookies). I did not like them. There were also large, sugared cookies cut in the shape of angels and Santa Claus. The sugar cookies were hung on the Christmas tree. We were not allowed to remove them from the tree, but we could have any that fell off. By a strange coincidence, one or two would fall off every night! At the beginning of Lent, mother would make *Pfannkuchen* (like pancakes) which she rolled in powdered sugar. They tasted great! Throughout the year she made sheet cakes—peach, apple, and crumb. The dough was rolled really thin and would rise to about one-half inch in thickness. I liked the crumb cake best. It had a thick layer of crumbs and tasted good with hot cocoa in the wintertime. These cakes were about two feet in diameter and were baked on large, round tins. I think the wooden board she used to roll out the dough is still in the attic. Mother did not bake bread, but each Friday Uncle Paul brought home bread from his street route. They were large, round loaves of Rokos rye bread, which tasted very good when fresh. However, by the end of the week the bread that was left had become dry and hard. Sometimes Uncle Paul would also bring home bags of stale buns and doughnuts. We were always glad to get them.

#### PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MEDICINE

The dread of various diseases was always on people's minds. Tuberculosis was a great threat and it had no definitive cure. A person with pneumonia was considered to be at death's door, and often was. There were smallpox, scarlet fever, and typhoid as well. These diseases were not fully understood by the medical profession and were treated mainly by general practitioners. A great flu epidemic occurred during World War I and killed thousands of people. Many of our friends and neighbors died, but—strange to

say—I can recall no member of the Fischer family who contracted the flu at this time.

Uncle Paul had a homeopathic kit for his family. It contained about twenty-five bottles of different pills, with a chart showing which pills to use for certain problems. He had a lot of faith in it, and his family was always treated with it. A lot of natural remedies were used. Mother bottled red raspberry juice that we would drink when we had an upset stomach. It really worked for me

We suffered quite a bit with teeth problems. One could always see children with badly swollen jaws and a scarf wrapped around their face and tied at the top of their head. There was a wax substance which we placed around the tooth that was supposed to provide some relief. It was difficult to get to town to see a dentist because it meant a walk to Middle River and a long streetcar ride into town. When we did have a tooth pulled, it was pure torture. I can't recall if the dentist used an injection to lessen the pain or not. When a drill was used to fill a tooth, it was a dry drill which hurt almost as much as the toothache. Sometimes there was an assistant to hold the patient in the chair. Many people asked to be put to sleep with gas, but we never did. We were afraid we would not come out of it.

#### SCHOOLDAYS

At age six I entered school. I was not able to Speak English at that time. Our school was Baltimore County School #9, District 14, and was known as Poplar School. It got its name from the Poplar railroad station and had been formerly known as Buck's School. It was located on the west side of Philadelphia Road about one-half mile north of Middle River Road. It was later converted to a residence and was still standing as of 1990.

Philadelphia Road was formerly known as the Great Eastern Road, also as the old Post Road. In colonial times, it was the only direct road between the cities on the east coast. It originally was an Indian trail. Colonel John Eager Howard is said to have made the first survey of the road in 1787. On December 20, 1791, the Maryland General Assembly appointed Commissioners to lay out and mark the new road.

The Philadelphia road had been used frequently by George Washington in his travels between Mount Vernon, Philadelphia and New York. Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and others who were important to the founding of our nation also traveled along the road. The troops of Generals LaFayette and Rochambeau marched along the road on their way to Yorktown and the final battle of the Revolutionary War.

The first regular stage line to Philadelphia over this road was started by Gabriel Van Horn in 1782. It ran from the Fountain Inn in Baltimore to the Havre De Grace ferry. There it met the Philadelphia stage and transferred the passengers and mail. The fare was \$4.00 per person, and letters were carried for one-sixth of a hard dollar. Other stage lines of the time were operated by William Clark in 1788, William Evans in 1794 and Stockton and Stokes in 1818. In 1811, the New Pilot stage, owned by D. Fulton and Company, left Gadsby's tavern in Baltimore and traveled straight through to Philadelphia in one day. It arrived at the Mansion House in Philadelphia early in the evening. The fare was \$8.00. As a child attending Poplar School I was impressed by the historical significance of Philadelphia Road. The fact that persons famous in the history of our nation passed over it seemed to make our study of history come alive.

Each public school in Baltimore County had a committee of citizens, called trustees, to take care of the maintenance of the physical property. These trustees served without pay. The trustees for Poplar School were W. Howard Milling, Dr. Oliver Davies and my father. Dr. Davies' wife had at one time been a music teacher in the city and she would come to the school several times a year and conduct singing lessons. Their son, Floyd (Bosie) Davies was my best friend at school. He died about 1978.

The school had two rooms, two teachers, eight grades and about forty pupils. There were twin desks with inkwells and folding seats. Each room had a blackboard and there were individual slates for writing lessons, but we no longer used them. Each room had a coal-burning furnace for heat. There was a water bucket and dipper to use for drinking water. A bell was on the roof for starting and stopping classes, and there were two outbuildings in the yard for toilets. One student, usually one of Uncle Edmund's children, served as janitor and would come to school early to take out the ashes and sweep the floors. The student received a small amount of pay for this work. Other chores that the students performed included filling inkwells, beating erasers, and bringing in drinking water.

We walked to school through the woods behind our house and across the railroad tracks, a distance of about one mile. When we walked home from school in the wintertime, we would walk along the railroad tracks and pick up lumps of coal to take home for heating the house. Sometimes locomotive firemen on trains would see us and throw out lumps of coal for us. Books were carried in a book bag at the side with a strap over the shoulder. At the beginning of the school term, our parents bought us what

was called a companion: a small box containing a pen, pencil, eraser and a ruler. They also bought a notebook. We carried our lunch in a paper bag.

During my time at Poplar School the principal was Rose Gilbert. She lived in the Benson area and boarded with local families during the week. Assistant teachers at various times were Mamie Peper, Mary Norris, and Irene Baer. The assistant teacher had the first four grades in one room and the principal had the four older grades in the other room. Children in the younger classes could hear lessons being taught to the older children and benefit from them. Punishment in the form of switching was done by the principal, but very seldom. Usually the threat of switching was enough. Miss Gilbert was a no-nonsense teacher and quite a disciplinarian. She always wore black! She died in middle age and is buried at St. Stephen's in Bradshaw.

During recess periods we played hide-and-go-seek, catty (a piece of broomstick about four inches long and pointed at both ends, was laid on the ground and one end was hit with a broomstick; as it flew up; it was hit again, and the person hitting it the farthest won), marbles, and spinning tops. When the weather was warm, we went swimming in a branch near school during recess. The girls played ring-around-the-rosy and jacks. On Arbor Day, we all helped to rake and clean up the school yard. During my school years we never heard of soccer or football and we never owned a baseball or tennis ball. Balls were usually made out of rubber and painted in different color patterns.

The truant officer was Mr. Hershner, a tall, very stern-looking man. He had a black mustache and always wore a black suit. He drove a black buggy pulled by a black



horse. He would come around to the school about twice a year to handle truancy and discipline problems. Many years later he often fished with Captain Edwards out of the Edwards' boat yard on Frog Mortar Creek in Bowleys Quarters.

County law required attendance through seven grades of school. Some children dropped out at this point to help out at home or on the farm. There were some eighth-grade graduating classes with only one graduate. I do not know of any graduate who went on to public high school after the eighth grade. The nearest high school was in Towson, which required a trip to Baltimore by train and then the student had to travel by streetcar or the "Ma & Pa Railroad" to Towson ("Ma & Pa" was a popular nickname for the Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad).

After graduating from the eighth grade at the age of fifteen, I got a job at the Rossville plant of the Baltimore Brick Company. My father also worked there. One of my duties was to sit at a long inclined conveyor belt and pick out stones from the clay going to the brick making machines. After hours at this job I would get the strange sensation of the conveyor standing still and the building revolving around me. I was paid \$12.00 for a full six-day week. I gave my mother \$6.00 per week board, put \$2.00 per week in the Golden Ring Building Association, and paid for my clothes and other expenses with the remainder.

I also enrolled in the evening classes at the Maryland Institute. I took the four-year course in Architectural Drafting. I went three nights a week to the school which was then located next to the fish market in downtown Baltimore City. After working outdoors in the cold all day (there was no lightweight thermal clothing in those days),

I would come home with my hands swollen and numb, dress in a cold bedroom and then travel to school in a car with no heater. My father drove me until I was old enough to get a license. Whenever we passed by lighted houses on the way to night school, I was envious of the people who were warm and cozy inside. During our graduation exercises at the Lyric Theater I was asked to come up and receive the Martin Myerdirck prize for outstanding effort.

After that, I went to the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute for two years, taking courses in Mathematics, and then to Johns Hopkins for five years (at night) for courses in Structural Engineering. During those years I also completed an extensive International Correspondence School in building construction and a course in English composition. In 1936 I became a registered architect and am still registered today (1990).

**ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH  
AT STEMMERS RUN (ZION EVANGELISCHE  
LUTHERISCHE GEMEINDE)**

Zion Lutheran Church was (and still is) a small country church which sat on the top of a hill overlooking the surrounding countryside. There were open sheds in the churchyard to house the horses that brought the people to church. There were, I believe, three bells in the steeple. In the early days, a bell would be rung one hour before the start of the service in order to give the surrounding farm people time to get ready for church. The countryside was quiet in those days, and I can remember hearing the bells on Bird River Road. At the beginning of the service, all the bells would be pealed in a certain pattern and the entire church seemed to vibrate. Then during the recital of the Lord's Prayer a single bell was rung. This bell was called "our father" bell. A bell was

also tolled when a funeral procession came into sight. The number of times the bell was rung was equal to the age of the deceased. After a fire in 1987, the steeple housing the bells was taken down and rebuilt. Before World War I, services were entirely in German. After the war, English was introduced gradually.

The congregation was originally segregated: the men sat on the right and the women on the left. My mother always sat in the rear pew, women's side, next to the aisle. The Church Council (*die Vorsteher*) occupied a bench, set lengthwise, at the corner of the church. They were always older men. On entering, some of them would stand facing the corner and say a prayer. Some would remove their shoes for comfort during the service. The Reverend Henry Ellenberger was the pastor, and Mrs. Ellenberger was the organist. The organ was in the balcony at the rear of the church. It was powered by a bellows which was pumped by a long handle on the back of the organ. The bellows was pumped by the janitor, Mr. Gross. The choir also sang from the balcony. My father was a member. After the service, people

would gather in the vestibule or outside for handshaking and socializing. For many farm women this was the only opportunity they had during the week to put on their best clothing and socialize. As a rule, the pastor did not mingle with the congregation at this time.

Sunday School classes were held in the church proper and younger children were not required to attend the regular church service. Those who did would sit with their parents and observe proper decorum. Attendance was required in confirmation class for one term. During my term, classes were conducted in both German and English at the same time. Attendance at the regular church service was strictly required, and any breach of decorum on the part of the students was heard about at the next class. Each confirmation class selected a class hymn which was sung during the processional at the confirmation service. Our class chose "Savior Like A Shepherd Lead Us". During the service, each of the confirmands was required to recite a portion of Luther's catechism as requested by the pastor.



Rudolph Sr. at age 13 with his parents and brother Herbert, who died in 1920

One of the most important services was the Christmas Eve service. It was usually held at night. During the service children would recite the Christmas story. My cousin Walter was always very good at this. After the service each child received a small box of sugar candy. A special part of the Easter service was the twin trumpet solos played by the Betz girls.

For a time the annual Sunday School picnic was held at Budel's Park on the Middle River. During the picnic each Sunday School child received a five-cent check for a free ice cream cone. Other special events were steamboat excursions, oyster suppers, and strawberry festivals. As there was no assembly hall at the church, large gatherings such as suppers and festivals were held in Rock-About-Hall at Philadelphia and Ridge Roads. The church organizations included the Ladies' Aid Society (*Frauenverein*), the Young People's Society (*Jugendverein*) and the choir.

#### CHRISTMAS

Christmas Eve was a time of almost unbearable excitement for us. Early on Christmas morning Father would make us wait until he checked to see if Santa Claus had come and gone. Santa was always just leaving, and we could hear loud talk. When the front door slammed, father said he was gone and we could come down. The tree was lit with candles. The windup train was running, and the presents were under the tree. Gifts were never wrapped. The scent of fresh pine and burning candles filled the room and I will never forget the smell of it. First we had to sing Christmas carols, with father at the pump organ, then we could examine the presents.

On December 11, 1920, my younger brother, Herbert, died at the age of 12. This

was a terrible time for us. He had been operated on at Johns Hopkins Hospital for a brain tumor, but he did not survive the surgery. The hospital's best surgeons donated their time. When father came home from the hospital and told us that Herbert had died, my mother and father sat with their arms around each other and cried. He was laid out where we usually had the Christmas tree. Funerals at that time were conducted from the home and a crepe was hung on the mailbox-black for adults and white for children. The undertaker provided a hearse and at least one coach for the family. Funeral coaches were beautifully finished in black with large ornamental lamps (coach lamps) on each side and beveled windows. The coachmen wore high, black, flat-topped silk hats and drove a matched pair of black horses with fine livery. The undertaker was Mr. Lassahn. A good friend of our family, W. Howard Milling, gave Father his family burial plot at Zion Church to use as a gravesite for Herbert. As the funeral traveled along the roads to the churchyard, it was the custom for men to stop and remove their hats as the procession was passing. At Herbert's burial service, the Zion Lutheran Sunday School children surrounded the grave and sang hymns.

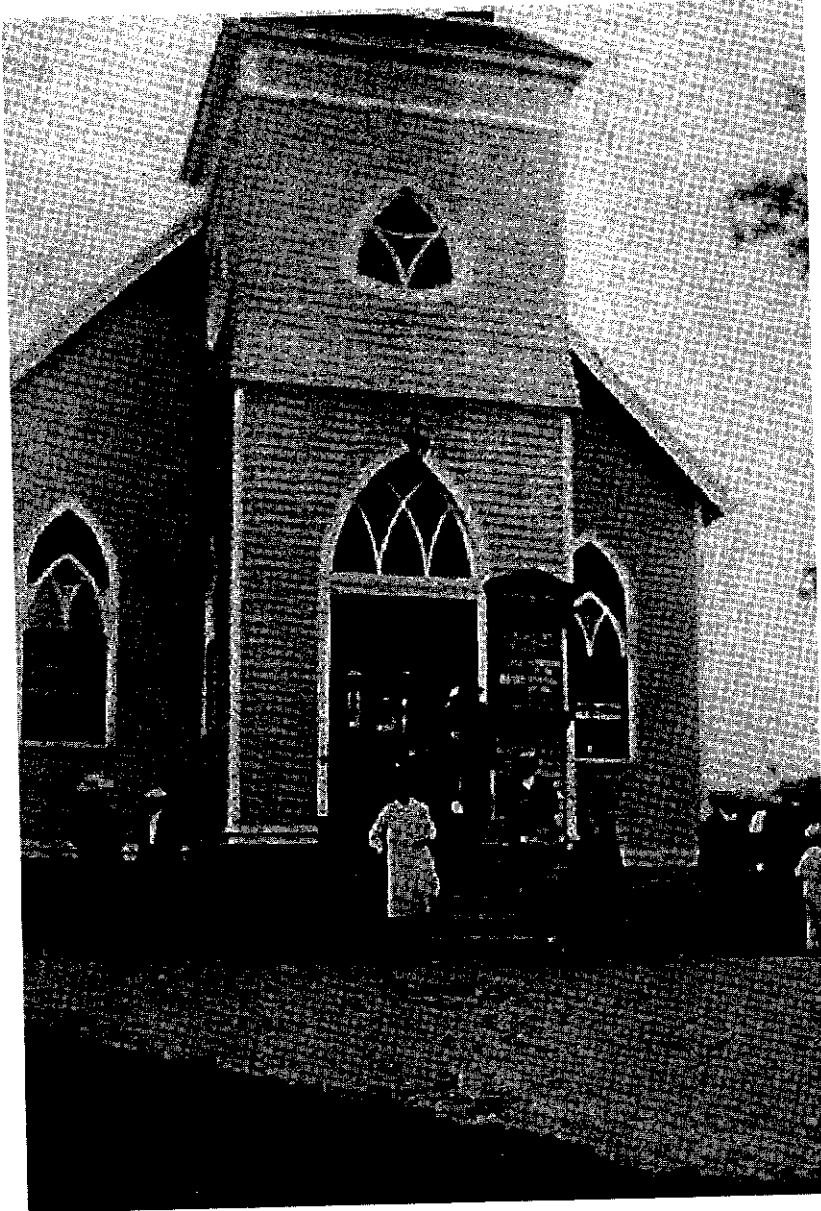
For this sad occasion my parents purchased my first store-bought suit. They did not take me with them to the store to try it on, and it was an ill-fitting affair of coarse and scratchy wool. I cannot ever remember wearing it again. The day of Herbert's funeral was one of the lowest points of my life. After that, Christmas was never the same at our house.

MISCELLANEOUS REMINISCENCES

OYSTER SHELL ROADS

Every few years, the county roads near the rivers would be spread with oyster shells. Bird River Road was among them. It was almost impossible to walk or ride a bike on

them until they were crushed to a powder by passing horses and wagons. After the shells were crushed, the roads would have a beautiful white appearance. The oyster shells were brought from Baltimore oyster packing houses by sailboat to landings on the Seneca, Middle and Back Rivers.



Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, ca. 1920

## GUDGEON FISHING

Around May 1, we would watch the stream running through the woods near our home for the annual gudgeon run. Every day after school we would walk to the stream to look for them. When the first schools of fish appeared we would go running home shouting "gudgeons are up." Gudgeons were small fish about four inches long and shaped like sardines. In the springtime they would come into the stream in enormous schools to spawn. They would jump and crawl up the smallest trickle of water-almost to our house. We would use our hands or small nets to catch them by the bucketful. In deeper water, we used a tiny hook and worm to catch them. Fishing for gudgeons was a big thing for the city people who came by train to the Gunpowder River to fish for them.

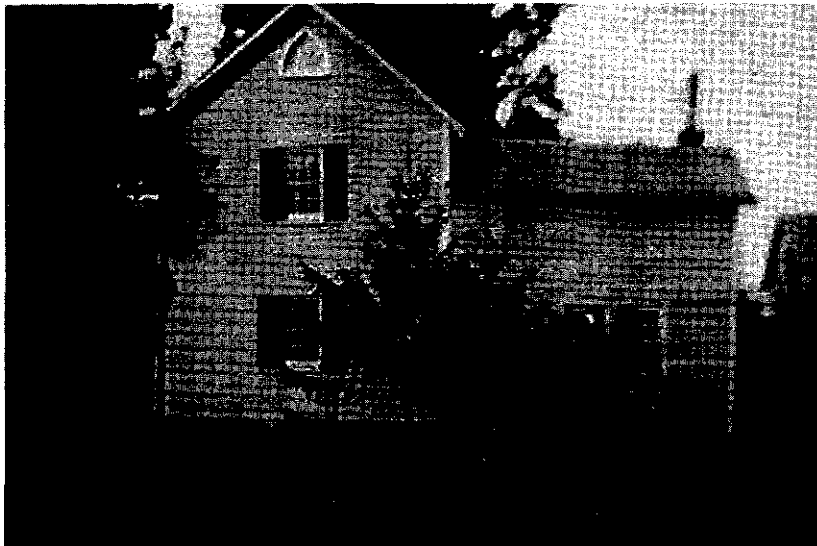
## HERRING FISHING

At the time of the gudgeon run the herring came up also, but they stayed in the deeper streams. We fished for them at night along

White Marsh Run, between Ebenezer and Bird River Roads. As a small boy, I went with Father and Uncle Paul. Using an oil lantern, we walked down the stream and listened for jumping herring. If the moon was right, and they were jumping, it would mean that a school of fish was moving up the stream. It was very scary for me to walk in those woods at night with owls hooting all around. The men fished with a dip net and it was my job to bag the herring after they threw them on the bank. I have seen as many as twenty-five herring caught in one dip. We smoked the herring in a smoke-house to eat during the winter months, but other people pickled them in brine by the barrelful. In the 1920s, a local company polluted the stream and the fishing gradually died out.

## HUCKLEBERRIES

During huckleberry season, we would go with Mother to the woods to pick huckleberries (blueberries). We always dusted our arms and legs with sulfur first to discourage



Right side of original Fischer family home, ca. 1890  
(c.f. cover photo)

chiggers. However, when we got home there would still be little red chiggers left to cause itching and swelling. We tied tin buckets around our waists to put the berries in while we were picking. Mother would bake pies with the huckleberries.

#### BALLOONS

On the evening of the Fourth of July, people would send up hot air paper balloons. Each balloon was about four feet in diameter and had a straw wick which was lit to supply the hot air. The balloon was held by four people until the hot air caused the balloon to float away. The next morning we were always up early to look for balloons that had come down during the night. One time I actually found one. These balloons were later outlawed because of the fire hazard.

#### LAWN PARTIES

Some evenings during the summer, Uncle Paul's daughters would have their friends in to a lawn party. They would hang paper Japanese lanterns on lines which were strung between the trees. Each lantern had a candle inside. My brother and I were too small to be invited, but we enjoyed the excitement.

#### WHIPPOORWILLS

During summer evenings at dusk, the whippoorwills would start calling their "whippoor-will" call. The low note of the call was the "poor". They were very shy birds, but occasionally one would call at the edge of the lawn. They came out only in the evening. The whippoorwills disappeared in the 1930s.

#### FARMING

In the area from Patapsco Neck to Belair Road were farms which we called "truck farms." These were farms which grew the

fruits and vegetables which were supplied fresh to the city on a daily basis. This produce was called "garden truck". At sundown each day, long lines of wagons, loaded with produce, would head for the commission merchants in the city. The merchants were located at Marsh (Mash) Market, now called Market Place. The wagons were pulled by two horses and had a high driver's seat so that produce could be stored under it. The more prosperous farmers had fine painted wagons with scrollwork and their names painted on the side in gold leaf. Farmers who lived farther from the city grew sugar corn, tomatoes and beans. This produce was hauled to local canneries. Wheat and field corn was taken to local grist mills. Dairy herds supplied milk which was shipped to the cities by train.

#### THRESHING WHEAT

The fall was threshing season for the farmers who grew wheat. When the grain was ripe in the fields, it would be cut with a binder. The binder was a machine with a large wooden spool which laid over the stalks in one direction, tied them into bundles with binder twine, and threw them on the ground. The bundles would then be gathered in horse-drawn wagons and stored in the hayloft of the barn until the threshers arrived. Mr. Milling was the wheat farmer in our area; none of the Fischers grew it.

The threshing machinery consisted of a large, steam-powered engine with large steel wheels. This engine pulled a wooden threshing machine about twenty feet long with all sorts of pulleys and belts on the side. When the threshers were about one-half mile away, they would blow their steam whistle to let the farmers know they were coming. This was also the signal for the boys in the neighborhood to gather and watch the work. My wife Marie's uncle,

George Schuler, owned one of the threshing machines.

The steam engine was set up about fifty feet outside the barn so that its chimney sparks would not start a fire. The threshing machine itself was set up inside the barn and hooked up to the engine by a long belt. A long spout projected out of the rear of the barn to blow out the threshed straw. The men would throw the bundles of wheat that had been stored in the hayloft into the machine with pitchforks. One man would stand at the side of the threshing machine to bag the wheat. We boys helped out by carrying water for the steam engine. It was the job of the farm wives to provide a hearty meal for the threshers.

The steam engine was also used to operate the many sawmills that were in the area. The mills sawed lumber to order for houses, barns, etc. Waste wood powered the boiler of the steam engine.

#### DAHLIA SHOW

During the fall of the year in the early 1900s, the big neighborhood event was Vincent's Dahlia Show. The Vincents were probably the largest growers of dahlia roots in the nation. Their farm extended from Bird River Road to Ebenezer Road, and north and south from Vincent Farm Road. Mr. Vincent was a large man with a long white beard. He was very severe and strict and he carried a cane. My cousin, Lena, worked in the office at the farm. Mr. Vincent's grandson, Steve, was very much interested in Lena and he would call on her on Sunday nights in his little red Willys-Oldsmobile. However, nothing ever came of this romance. I believe it was because Steve was a Methodist and Lena was a Lutheran. Steve later married Albert Edwards' sister, Myrtle. Lena never married.

Professional flower arrangers from New York were brought in to arrange the flowers for the dahlia show. The cut dahlias were placed in panels about six feet square. These panels were on both sides of the aisle in a long exhibition building. During the show, school would be dismissed for one day so that our teachers could take us to see the flowers.

Mother told me that when I was a baby she entered me in the baby contest. I won a prize for being a healthy baby. When I was older, we were at the show, and Governor Ritchie was there. My mother was standing well in the background, as usual, and for some unknown reason, the Governor pushed through the crowd and shook her hand. The shows were discontinued about the time of World War I.

#### RABBIT HUNTING

When I was about ten years of age, I would set wooden traps for rabbits during rabbit hunting season. Every morning before going to school I would check the traps. We usually caught three or four rabbits in a season. When I was around twelve years old my father allowed me to use a shotgun, so I managed to get a few more. The rabbits that we did not eat I gave to Uncle Paul to sell on his street route in East Baltimore. I would receive from twenty-five to fifty cents each for them, depending on the demand. All of the meat and grocery stores would have bunches of dead rabbits, which were for sale, hanging out front. Later on, the sale of wild rabbits was outlawed.

#### CROWFLYWAY

During the winter season and up to about 1930, there was a crow fly-way located back of Bird River Road about where the electric transmission line is now located. Every winter evening, just before dusk, a

continuous procession of thousands of crows would fly towards their roost in the woods behind City Hospital. The hospital was formerly called Bay View Hospital; it is now the Key Medical Center. They had probably roosted there for hundreds of years. The procession would last about one hour, and I am sure that they came from as far north as Pennsylvania. When they were flying into a strong headwind they would soar up high and then dive almost to the ground. As their roosting area became built up, the flyway gradually died out.

#### SNOWSTORMS

Before 1912 roads were seldom cleared of snow except in deeply drifted places. People often had to rely on sleighs for transportation. Usually straps, with sleigh bells attached, were laid across the horses' back and the bells jingled merrily as the horse trotted along. After a snowstorm there would be absolute quiet in the country except for clucking chickens, barking dogs, and occasional train whistles. There were no airplane or motor vehicle noises, so the sleigh bells could be heard a long distance away.

Some winters the roads would drift shut. The County had no way to plow them so the local farmers would hitch up as many as eight horses to a wooden plow to open the roads again. Where the drifts were too deep to plow, someone would get authorization from the local County Commissioner to gather a group of people to shovel them out by hand for a small wage.

#### LOGGING

In the period shortly before World War I, there was a logging operation in the neighborhood. Entire long tree trunks would be hauled from the surrounding woods by heavy wagons. The wagons were pulled by

six mule teams. The tobacco-chewing driver, holding a long bullwhip, would sit astride a rear mule. We children called them blacksnake whips. Using the bullwhip, along with some profanity, he urged the mules along.

The logs were taken to the Poplar Railroad Station and loaded on flat cars for transportation to Baltimore. We understood that there, in some manner, they would be burned in a copper-refining operation.

#### PAINTING HOUSES

In the early 1900s, ready-mixed paints were barely available. Professional painters mixed their own lead paste, linseed oil, turpentine, Japan dryers, and tinting colors. Homeowners had their paint mixed to order in paint stores.

My father ordered his ready-mixed paint from out-of-town. It was shipped in drums to Poplar Station. After school, it was my job to go to the station to see if any freight had arrived for him. He made arrangements to have painting done by housepainters who traveled through the rural areas doing this type of work. During the week they boarded at the places where they were working and returned to the city by train on the weekends.

One widely-used white lead paste was *Dutch Boy*, which was manufactured in Philadelphia and shipped to Baltimore by the Erricson Line Steamers. One of the steamers was the Anthony Groves, Jr. These steamers docked at Pier 1 at the corner of Pratt and Light Streets.<sup>2</sup> I have gone there to pick up freight and found that their schedules were very uncertain. The steamers stopped at Betterton where they maintained a warehouse at the end of a long pier. They probably also stopped, on demand, at Tolchester and Rock Hall.



Later, the use of lead paint for interior work was outlawed because it was proven that children were poisoned by chewing on the paint.

#### W. HOWARD MILLING

Mr. Milling was a good friend of our family. He had a grade school education, but he was a man with a great deal of common sense and a fine gentleman. From listening to the conversations of older members of the family, I learned that Howard's father, James Milling, formerly managed the company store at the Howard family's Locust Grove iron furnace on Race Road. I suppose that Howard Milling was named after the Howard family. As a young boy, I remember going with my father to the Stemmer House, which was located at Locust Grove. There he discussed with Miss Sallie Hayes some repair work that needed to be done to the house. Miss Hayes was related to the Howard family. The Stemmer House was later taken apart and re-erected on Caves Road where it now houses a publishing company.

Mr. Milling was a trustee of Poplar School and was later elected to the State Legislature. Around 1933, he was elected president of the County Commissioners of Baltimore County. I believe that the Cromwell Bridge Road bridge over the Gunpowder River and the Race Road bridge over Stemmers Run both have plaques bearing his name as County Commissioner. He had two daughters, and his brother Walter had no children, so the family name has now died out. There is a picture of him at the house-warming and oyster roast at our new house on Bird River Road.

#### MY MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR I

World War I started in Europe in 1914 and ended in 1918. Almost eight million soldiers

lost their lives. Things were going badly for the Allies before President Wilson declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. I was ten years old at the time and did not fully comprehend the meaning of this. Right up until our entry into the war there was a strong anti-war feeling in the country. When Germany started an all-out submarine offensive against our ships carrying munitions to the Allies, the country slowly drifted toward involvement.

Our family was of German extraction and attended German church and Sunday School services. We looked upon these developments (i.e. possible American involvement in the war) with apprehension and dismay. There was strong anti-German feeling among some people. However, except for a few isolated incidents, there were no strong feelings against us among our friends and neighbors. We learned to keep a low profile. Our family friends, the Millings, who were a leading family in our community, at no time changed their friendly attitude towards us.

However, there were several incidents which deeply impressed me. On one occasion, my father was talking to the post-mistress at Middle River. When he made some remark about the war that she did not like, she told him, "you ought to be locked up for the duration of the war, and I will report you to the authorities". That night I could not sleep because I was sure that the authorities would come and take him away. Another time there was an evening war bond rally at Poplar School. There was an address by Congressman Cole, during which he referred to Germans as "Huns." My father walked out of the room. The next day the principal, Miss Gilbert, apologized to us for the Congressman's remarks.

My cousin Frederick worked at Sparrows Point.<sup>3</sup> He signed up during an enlistment rally there and, without a word to his family, he was immediately shipped off to camp. It took several days for his family to find out what happened to him. He was sent off to help guard the Panama Canal and lived through the war in comparative luxury. My cousin Martha married her husband while he was a member of the 313th Infantry. On the afternoon of his wedding day he had to leave for France. There he fought in some of the biggest battles of the war without receiving an injury. Families having members in the service would display a service flag in their window with a star for each member serving. A gold star was displayed for members who had lost their lives in the war.

I remember the long, long troop trains filled with soldiers on their way to the front. They would wave to us children standing by the tracks. One time a soldier threw out a small box of candy with his name and address on it and the request that we please write to him. I gave the box to an older sister of one of my friends, but I do not know what came of it.

This was also the time of the great flu epidemic, which killed both soldiers and civilians in unprecedented numbers. I have heard that it killed more soldiers than bullets did. Strange to say, I can recall no member of my family having it, but it did kill many friends and neighbors.

When our soldiers and supplies reached France in large numbers, the tide of the war turned. After some hard-fought battles, the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918. I distinctly remember walking home from school one day and hearing the bells and whistles in Baltimore, which was ten miles away. There was no radio to give

us the news, but we soon found out about it by word of mouth.

One other memory is of my mother receiving her first letter from her family in Germany after the war. Her father, brothers and sisters were still alive, but a brother-in-law had been lost on the Russian front. His body was never found.

### PROHIBITION

The Volstead Act, passed in 1920, prohibited the manufacture and possession of any alcoholic beverage, beer, wine, or liquor which could lead to intoxication. This effectively closed most breweries and saloons. Beer of very low alcoholic content was legally sold and was called "near beer".

Needless to say, the law was not very popular, and people found all kinds of ways to get around it. Many people, including my father, bought malt and hops in canned form and made their own beer. All the necessary materials for brewing and bottling beer were freely available. This "home brew" frequently exploded in the bottles and it did not taste like brewery beer. A lawyer in Baltimore bought new unfermented wine and allowed it to ferment to a high alcoholic content in his home, "Alan Hill." He challenged the revenue people to arrest him, but nothing ever came of it.

There were many bootlegging operations making booze, but most people who knew about them did not report them. Liquor was smuggled in from Canada or by way of the ocean. At social affairs, men carried thin hip flasks filled with liquor or what was called "bathtub gin." This was the era of Al Capone, who built his empire on bootlegging.

Everyone realized that the law was not working, and it was finally repealed during the big depression of 1933. It was felt that

repealing the law would help to stimulate business.

### **THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

The Great Depression began with the stock market crash of 1929. However, the years 1931-1934 were the worst period of the depression. Formerly successful businessmen could be seen selling apples and pencils on street corners. People in the financial business were destroyed both financially and physically, and there were many suicides. There were a great number of bank failures, and I saw many men in the banking community broken completely because their friends had entrusted their savings with them. All of the banks in the nation were closed for a period of time in 1933. The best skilled craftsmen were grateful for work at seventy-five cents per hour. An unskilled worker's pay went as low as fifteen cents per hour.

During the 1920s, my father was an agent for the Baltimore County Mutual Fire Insurance Company. During the depression they went bankrupt. The court assessed all of the policy holders on record approximately \$75.00 in order to pay the debts of the company. In those times, most people did not have this rather large sum to spare. This put Father in a rather difficult position with them.

I started my home-building business in December of 1931 in the midst of the Great Depression. My friends told me that it was foolish to start a business at such a financially unstable time. However, the business survived until I retired in 1979. My son then took over the business, and it is still active in Glen Arm, Maryland.

### **TRANSPORTATION IN MY LIFETIME**

We lived in the country about ten miles from Baltimore. Our only methods of transporta-

tion when I was a boy were to walk, to ride a bicycle, or to travel by a buggy pulled by our old plow horse, whose name was "Schimmel." If we wanted to go to Baltimore, we would walk one mile to Poplar Station on the B & O railroad line or walk two miles to the electric trolley at Middle River.

### **RAILROADS DURING THE TIME OF STEAM ENGINES**

As a small boy, I remember lying in bed at night listening to train whistles. Each engineer had his own distinctive whistle. It was a fascinating and haunting sound, and I often wondered to what faraway places the trains were bound.

Poplar Station, on the B & O Railroad, was a small passenger and freight station and an important switching point. There was a two-story switching tower. On the first floor was a small passenger waiting room, and on the second floor a signal room. The signal room was manned twenty-four hours a day by an operator who also was an expert telegrapher. The telegraph key chattered continuously with messages being relayed along the line. The operator reported the time of passing trains to the dispatching office, operated the switches, and relayed traffic orders to passing train crews. There was a white panel hanging on the track side of the tower on which he posted certain signals for the passing train crews. More detailed orders were hung on a large loop which the operator would hold up at track side. The fireman would hang out of the cab of the train, with his arm extended, and catch the loop with the traffic orders at full speed. There was also a bank of levers about six feet tall in the signal tower to operate the switches. The switches were operated over a distance of several hundred feet through a system of rods and levers. Across the tracks

was a small building, open on the track side, for passengers and freight.

There were two main tracks, north- and southbound with two sidings-one in each direction-branching off at the tower. The sidings were about one mile long in order to accommodate the long freight trains which needed to clear the track for express trains. When these side-tracked trains were to be stopped beyond a certain amount of time, the train was supposed to be taken off the main line at private crossings. I remember a train which was separated for traffic at the Baltimore Brick Company crossing. Omar Petts, the timekeeper, attempted to cross over the main track in his car but was hit by an express train. Petts' car was rolled up into a ball, but he managed to jump clear in time. Whenever a train was stopped on the main line, the brakeman had to walk back a certain distance to flag oncoming trains. He also placed an explosive package called a torpedo on the track as an additional warning. The tower operator controlled the switches for each siding, for switching trains on the main line and for a small siding for Poplar Station. This siding accommodated coal and lumber cars, etc. The switches also operated semaphore towers which showed engineers the condition of the tracks ahead. At night, they showed green, amber, and red lights. It was my understanding that the engineer and the fireman were required to call out the signal conditions to each other.

Located nearby was a tool room for the track maintenance crews. Henry Mohr was section foreman; later his brother Ernest took over. Each crew had a track walker whose job it was to walk along the tracks looking for defects. The track superintendent for the railroad would frequently check the condition of the track by riding as a passenger in a train passing over the track he

wanted to investigate. One of the tests that he would use was a glass of water in his railroad car. The movement of the water in the glass would indicate the degree of levelness and smoothness of the track.

Bordering the tracks were telegraph lines, bare wires mounted on poles with cross arms and large glass insulators. The poles carried the railroad signal wires and Western Union telegraph wires. The telegraph wires were the principal means of communication between the cities on the east coast. The telephone was not yet in common use. These wires would make a humming sound in any kind of wind which we believed by the messages passing over the wires. We would place our ears to the poles and attempt to listen to the messages. When Bob Wilde's airplane fell on the tracks near Poplar Station, the local Western Union man, Mr. Allman, rushed over and spliced certain wires. He said that they were most important for railroad and Western Union traffic. Passenger service was provided by passenger "locals," and freight service by freight "locals." I remember one occasion around 1912 when I rode out from town with my father on the local. We had to walk down a long stair in order to board the train. We must have been in the Mount Royal Station. The B & O Railroad's finest train was the "Royal Blue."

The bridge which carried Middle River Road over the B & O tracks at Poplar Station was of wrought iron construction. In the almost eighty years that I used the bridge, I can't recall that it was ever painted. It was also reported to be one of the last bridges in the nation made of wrought iron. The bridge was demolished in 1990.

Mail was carried on the Pennsylvania Railroad. There were special mail cars which were manned by railway postal clerks

who sorted the mail during the trip. These were much-sought-after jobs, and they were probably under civil service. The mail would be put aboard the train marked for various cities-Philadelphia, New York, Boston, etc.-and would be sorted for local distribution along the way. Mail was carried in heavy canvas sacks about four feet long. The mail for small local stations was thrown off the train onto the station platform as the train traveled through the station at full speed. The outgoing mail was hung on strong supports alongside the track. The postal clerks would swing a strong steel arm out of the baggage door of the train which would pick up the sack as the train passed by. Express shipments were carried in special cars marked "Railway Express Agency."

I remember Pennsylvania Railroad signal towers located at the Gunpowder River and at Bengies Station. The Bengies tower was manned by Ralph and Willard Schenkel. They lived near us and repaired watches in their spare time. The train crossings at Chase and Middle River were guarded by gates and watchmen, but others were unguarded; and there were numerous fatalities. Marie's Grandfather Schuler was hit by a train and killed at his private track crossing. The "Congressional Limited" was one of the Pennsylvania Railroad's best trains.

AUTOMOBILES: PEOPLE CALLED THEM "MACHINES"

We got our first car in 1916. It was a used 1914 Model T Ford touring car. It had a folding cloth top with isinglass windows on the sides which were kept rolled up in good weather. The car had two seats, and there was no door on the driver's side. There were oil lamps on the dash and a rubber bulb horn. Three floor pedals were used to drive the car in forward and reverse and to brake

it. The car was hand cranked with a choke button through the lower part of the radiator. Electric ignition was supplied by a magneto mounted on a fly wheel. The gasoline tank was under the front seat and it had a dip stick to measure how much gasoline was left in the tank. The gasoline was fed by gravity to the carburetor, and on a long, steep, uphill pull the carburetor would run dry. Then the car would have to be turned around and backed up the hill so that the gasoline could flow to the carburetor again. Tires were thin and often blew out because they were under a very high pressure of about seventy pounds. When low pressure tires came out they were called balloon tires. There were no heaters in the cars, so we used lap robes and wore long, leather gauntlets in the winter time. The radiators of the cars were covered with blankets when the car was parked in the winter time. People who lived in the city generally drained their cars and set them up on blocks for the duration of the winter. Almost all cars were black, with polished brass radiator, headlights and trim.

Early automobiles used carbide gas headlamps. The gas was supplied by a small gas generator mounted on the running board. The fuel for these generators was carbide, which was in the form of small gray pebbles. A measure of water was added to the carbide pebbles, and the mixture generated the carbide gas. Later models of cars had electric lights which were supplied by the magneto and no battery. If one wanted to make the headlights shine brighter, then you speeded up the engine. Boys would put several carbide pebbles and water in a can with a tight fitting lid. Then they would put one foot on the can and ignite the gas through a pinhole. This produced a loud explosion!

Carbide gas was also used in the country for lighting purposes. It was produced by generators of varying sizes. The gas was burned in ceramic tips and produced a strong white light. Cities had public gas systems from early on.

Up until the 1930s, there was a Baltimore City ordinance which required parking lights on vehicles parked on the city streets overnight. This was a small light which was usually mounted on the left rear fender. Whenever a new car was purchased, the first extra that had to be ordered was a parking light. After parking the car and walking to your destination, you would always worry if you had turned on the parking light. The police enforced this ordinance strictly. It was the custom for people to take rides in their automobiles on Sunday afternoons. Sometimes we would ride out to a favorite ice cream store which was located near the Loch Raven reservoir, or just to no place in particular. Before Marie and I were married, we would take a ride almost every Sunday afternoon.

#### AIRPLANES

In the days before World War I, airplanes were a rare sight in the skies. Whenever one appeared overhead, the children would call "airplane" and point to the sky in wonder.

My first ride in an airplane occurred in 1920 at Chesapeake Beach. It was a two-passenger wooden Curtiss flying boat with the engine above and behind the cockpit. The pilot would stand on the seat of the plane to start the engine with a hand crank. Later on in the twenties, I flew with barnstormers in World War I Jennies at a cost of \$3.00 per ride. During this time I spent many Saturday afternoons at Logan Field in Dundalk watching flying activities. In the early days at Logan Field I saw several peo-

ple killed in plane crashes. This had a sobering effect on me, and I never really had a desire to become a pilot.

I was present when the Schneider International Cup seaplane races were held at Bay Shore Park in 1925. The races were won by Jimmy Doolittle. Also I witnessed, at Harbor Field, the arrival of the first seaplane passenger flight from Bermuda.

In the early thirties, I flew in a Ludington Airlines Stinson trimotor plane from Washington to Philadelphia. I also flew the same route on P. R. I. Line (Eastern) in a Curtiss Condor. I still have copies of their schedules. We flew from the Washington terminal, called Hoover Airfield, which was located just south of Arlington Cemetery. It had one small wooden terminal building and a grass field. Planes flew low and slow in those days, and I remember on one of my trips to Philadelphia seeing my mother standing on the front lawn of our home and waving as we flew by. During this same period, I also flew with Clarence Chamberlain in his Curtiss Condor sightseeing plane. He was one of the early Trans-Atlantic flyers.

In 1936, I saw James Ray, wearing his large, black fur flying hat, land one of the first autogiros at Logan Field. An autogiro was a helicopter driven by a propeller in the front. Later, Ray flew on to Washington and made a much-publicized landing and take-off on Constitution Avenue.

I have seen the majestic dirigibles, the Graf Zeppelin, the Macon, and the Shenandoah, flying overhead. I also witnessed Lindbergh and his "Spirit of St. Louis" in flight over Baltimore.

In 1964 Marie and I flew to Florida on one of the first Boeing 707's. Later on we flew in Lockheed Electras and Boeing

727's. On one of the trips, the captain invited me to be seated in the cockpit and took my picture there.

My lifetime and that of the Wright brothers overlapped. I have seen transportation develop from the horse-and-buggy days, to automobiles, to air flight and finally the space age.

### **PARKVILLE: HARFORD ROAD ABOUT 1930**

My earliest recollection of this area is a trip by horse and buggy to a church service at St. John's Lutheran Church. It was on a Sunday afternoon and we sat on wooden benches in the wooded grove alongside the church. This was about 1912, I don't know why this is so fixed in my mind, except perhaps it was because it was my first trip to what seemed to be so far away from home. Also, perhaps it was the novelty of a church service in the woods.

During the 1920s and 1930s, land development was a big business. Developers would buy a tract of land, stake out building lots, put in a gravel road and start selling lots without any restrictions from the County. These developments had to be on or near a trolley-car line because few people had automobiles. Mr. Hurst of the Cityco Realty Company was one of the larger developers of the time. Among his developments was a tract of land which he bought from the estate of Dr. Wegefath, who operated the City and Suburban Realty Company. The tract extended from Harford Road to what is now the Parkville High School athletic field, and about four blocks south from Putty Hill Avenue. This area was called Parkville Summit. Mr. Hurst was a graduate of Princeton University and active in Baltimore society. I worked as a carpenter for him for about five years. We built a few houses along Putty Hill Avenue; but

then Mr. Hurst died, and his estate sold the tract to others. Where the Ridge Garden Apartments are now located was the Miller Farm. The Miller family was well established in the area and I believe most of the houses along Putty Hill Avenue were built by them.

Joe Moreland was another developer active in the area. He developed Moreland Avenue and called it California Orchards. This development included the property which we purchased in 1931. Mr. Moreland started the Moreland Memorial cemetery on Taylor Avenue and the Glen Haven cemetery in Glen Burnie. His son died in a boating accident on the bay.

On July 16, 1932, I married Marie Lena Scheeler. She lived on the farm with her family across Bird River Road from us. On May 23, 1933, we moved into our new home in Parkville at 8805 Harford Road. This was the time of the Great Depression when many banks failed and for a time all of them were closed. I had withdrawn most of my savings to pay for building the house; but Marie lost, in a failed bank, all the money that she had saved to buy furniture. These were desperate times, and sometimes we had almost no food in the house to eat. We were very grateful that Marie's father supplied us with fresh vegetables from his farm.

There was still a trolley line on our side of the road with small, four-wheeled cars. It ran from Hamilton, where people transferred from city cars, to Joppa Road. It was originally intended that the line would run to Belair, but it never happened. There were sidings at Parkville and at Hiss Avenue. While we were building our house, a trolley car came by with a fire on the roof. Mr. Shanklin, the motorman, borrowed a shovel and some sand to put out the fire. Our neigh-

bors, the Vaughan boys, would sometimes grease the tracks coming up the hill from Hiss Avenue and the car would sit there and spin its wheels. The terminal was later moved from Hamilton to Parkville.

The property which extended from our house to Putty Hill Avenue was owned by Mr. Clautice. There was an old toll gate house on the property which was then occupied by the Hiss Building Association. This land was later sold or given to St. Ursula's to build their rectory and church on. St. Ursula's, a mission congregation of St. Dominic's in Hamilton, was located in a small frame building on the northwest corner of Harford Road and Neifeld Avenue. It was established in 1932. Father Manley was the priest who founded the church and he was also the head priest at St. Dominic's. He was small in stature and very active in the community. Every Monday morning he could be seen walking down the street to the bank carrying a sack of money from the Sunday collection.

Both sides of Harford Road, north of Putty Hill Avenue to White Marsh Run (where the Beltway is now located), were built up with very nice homes with well-maintained grounds. There were no commercial establishments located along that section of the road. The first commercial activity was the original Barnickel's grocery store. This was followed by the original Carney Crab House and the Miller barber shop. On the east side of the road, where the Beltway is, was the Rittenhouse Ice Plant, which was built in 1924. They manufactured their own ice. The plant was operated by a large, single-cylinder diesel engine, which we could hear popping whenever the wind was coming from that direction. Opposite the ice plant was some sort of nightclub. Farther out the road was

Manser's General Store at the corner of Joppa and Harford Roads. The building was later occupied by the Harrod Printing Company. It was torn down in 1983, and an office building was erected in 1984.

At the northwest corner of Putty Hill Avenue and Harford Road (where the Evans Funeral Home is now located) was the original parsonage of Hiss Methodist Church. It was a large, stone house owned by Dr. Geary Long of Hamilton and rented out to the Amoss family. Dr. Long was the family doctor for the Scheelers; Marie's youngest brother, Geary, is named for him. The house was built around 1860 and torn down in 1981. Next to the house, located directly on the corner, was a Shell gas station which was operated by Dave Clugsten. Still later, the building was occupied by a radio and television repair shop owned by Mr. Cayce.

Across Putty Hill Avenue, on the southwest corner, was Walter West's confectionary store. Marie and I would often stop there before we were married for a sundae on our way home from the movies. Continuing south on Harford Road was the parsonage for Hiss Church and next to that was the original Hiss Church building. This building was very similar in construction to the original St. John's Lutheran Church building. At the northwest corner of Harford Road and Hiss Avenue was the original wooden Parkville School. The Hiss Church parking lot now occupies the space. The "new" three-story Parkville School was built across Harford Road and is still standing, although it is no longer a school. It now houses a Senior Citizens' Center and various other County agencies.

Putty Hill Avenue ended at Old Harford Road. If we wanted to travel to Towson, we had to use Joppa Road.



Where the Parkville Shopping Center is now located was the residence of Mr. Mann who owned Mann's Seed Company. It was a beautiful white stucco home with well-kept grounds. At that time, it was probably the finest house on Harford Road. Across the street from Mann's was Linganore Avenue, where I built the first and second houses of my new business in 1931. The houses were located at 2907 and 2909 Linganore Avenue. On Harford Road,

where a fast-food place stands now, was Hartje's Hardware Store. On the southwest corner of Harford Road and Taylor Avenue was Kilchenstein's Store and on the southeast corner was the Parkville Bank. Approximately one-half block west of Harford Road, on the north side of Taylor Avenue, was the Volunteer Fire Company (a dance school now occupies the site). In a steeple on the roof of the building was a fire bell. The original bell is now displayed on



Rudolph & Marie Fischer in the rear garden of his parents' home on Bird River Road, 1937

the grounds of the Baltimore County Fire department at Putty Hill and Old Harford roads. Where the County public parking lot is now was Gesswein's store, and across the street was an ice house which was also owned by the Gessweins. All one had to do to purchase ice was put the money in a slot and the ice came tumbling out. The old, wooden Parkville Hotel was at the southwest corner of Harford Road and Linwood Avenue; a gas station is there now.

Tradespeople were friendly and they let you know that they appreciated your business. For years, Mrs. Louise Gettier (we called her "Miss Louise"), the daughter of the owner of Vollmer's Market on Harford Road, would call Marie on the telephone every Thursday afternoon to take her grocery order for the week. After a long social conversation, sometimes lasting one-half hour, Miss Louise would list for Marie the fresh vegetables, meats, new products, etc. that were available for her selection. Then, on Friday, her order would be delivered to our house. The produce and meat were always of a high quality. We almost never went to a regular grocery store. When you did go to a grocery store, you gave your order to the clerk and he assembled the order for you. Milk was delivered to the house by the Western Maryland Dairy. A breadman from Rice's Bakery brought bread and other baked goods to the house several times a week. Foerkolb's truck delivered fresh fish once a week, and the drycleaners stopped by each week to pick up clothes that needed to be cleaned. The Fuller Brush man called regularly and the Jewel Tea Company delivered to the house monthly. We are still using some of their

chinaware premiums. We had a small wooden icebox on the back porch. When we needed ice, a card was placed in the front window showing the amount needed and then the iceman would deliver it. We received our mail by carrier from the Fullerton Post Office. Our mailbox was across Harford Road. The box is still in use at the office of the family business in Glen Arm. One of the Miller boys cut the lawn, and after about 1950 we had a domestic come out from the city to help with the housework.

All drug stores had marble-topped soda fountains with chairs. When ladies went into downtown Baltimore to shop, they would always wear hats and gloves. Purchases were never hand carried. All the large, downtown department stores such as Hutzlers, Hochschild Kohn, etc. had fancy delivery trucks with uniformed drivers. Anything that was purchased, even if it was only a box of handkerchiefs, was delivered to your home the same day or, at the very latest, the next day.

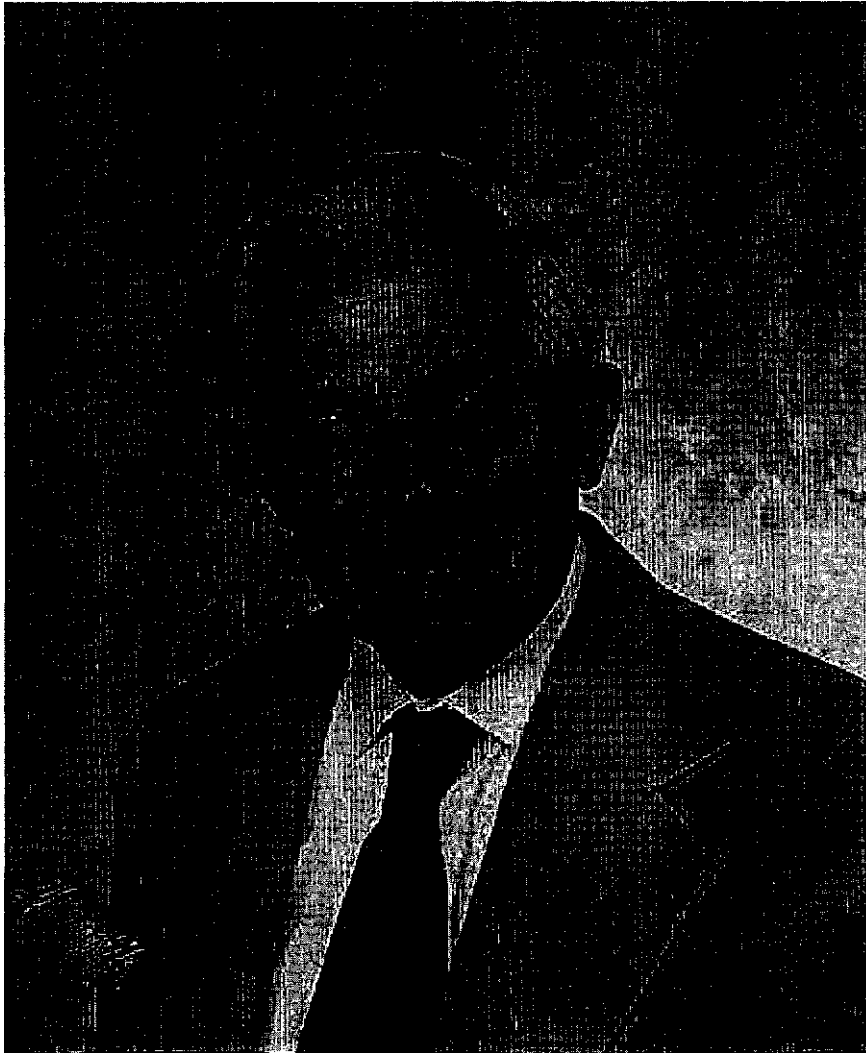
The older generations fade away and succeeding generations take their place in the family history. They have been taught by advice and, more importantly, by example the importance of good morals and diligence in the daily affairs of life. As the past comes more into focus, I reflect upon the good times and the bad and the joys and sorrows of daily living. I know that after life's darkest moments, the sun will always shine again.

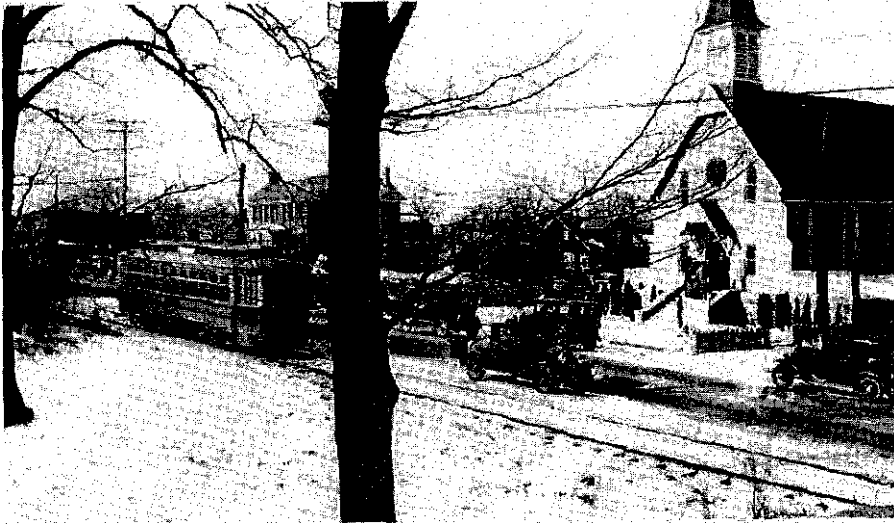
And so, after ninety-four years in America, the family goes on into the future. Hopefully, they will learn from, and not forget, the lessons learned by generations past.

Rudolph F. Fischer, Sr., ca. 1980 (facing page)

## Notes

- 1 One rood is forty square rods or one-quarter acre; a perch is one square rod. "One rood and eight perches" is thus three-tenths of an acre.
- 2 c.f., Robert H. Burgess, *This was Chesapeake Bay* (Cambridge, MD: Cornell Maritime Press, 1963, p. 69)
- 3 Until recently to say that someone worked at Sparrows Point would have meant that the individual worked for Bethlehem Steel.





View of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church (original frame building)  
from Fischer home at 8805 Harford Road, Winter 1936



View of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church (original frame  
building) from Fischer home at 8805 Harford Road, 1940s