

CAROL STUART WATSON

*The Beall-Dawson House, c. 1815
home of the Montgomery County Historical Society
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DARNESTOWN, AS IT WAS

by Jane Chinn Sween

Like many Montgomery County communities, the village of Darnestown is surrounded today by new housing developments. But along Darnestown Road (Route 28) where Seneca Road (Route 112) comes in from the south, one can still catch a glimpse of Darnestown as it was a century ago. This village, like its counterparts throughout the county, was home to the doctor, the merchant, the tavern keeper, the blacksmith, and the wheelwright who served the everyday needs of the farmers in the surrounding area.

Settlers came to the Darnestown area around 1750. One of the first was Ninian Beall. (He is not to be confused with the famous Ninian Beall, Indian fighter and patentee of "Rock of Dumbarton" on which Georgetown was founded.) Darnestown's

Ninian Beall began patenting land about 1749 when he acquired "Barren Hill." Just where he lived is not known (probably somewhere between Darnestown and Germantown), but he was a licensed tavern keeper. The greatest contribution he made to the community was his large family of girls. His daughters married men who were important in the community and thus became the maternal ancestors of the first families of Darnestown.

Ninian Beall's daughter, Ruth, married Charles Gassaway, a great grandson of Nicholas Gassaway, an early settler in the South River area of Anne Arundel County. Gassaway not only married Beall's daughter but also purchased land from him. Gassaway was well thought of in the community, served as a Captain in the Militia, and was a Coroner for Montgomery County. He built a brick house at "Pleasant Hills" in 1763-1765,¹ which remains today one of the most charming pre-Revolution homes in Montgomery County. At the time of his death in 1815, Charles Gassaway owned over 2000 acres of land. To his wife, Ruth, Gassaway left 400 acres of the dwelling plantation which was to go to their son, Charles, at her death. Ruth Beall Gassaway must have died by 1829 because, on September 28 of that year, Charles Gassaway sold² the dwelling house, buildings, and 425 acres of "Pleasant Hills," except a 10-square-yard lot which was the family burying ground, to James Hawkins. After the Civil War, the heirs of Hawkins sold the farm to John Thomas Kelley. Kelley, who was born in Baltimore County, had gone west but returned to Georgetown where he was a merchant for 20 years. Sometime before 1900, he added an east wing to the house. His son, Dr. John Thomas Kelley, a prominent Washington physician, added a symmetrical wing to the other side of the house in 1918. The wings were made of bricks taken from old slave quarters on the farm and laid in Flemish bond to match the original house.³ Long before Dr. Kelley's death in 1953, "Pleasant Hills" became the residence of his son, Thomas C. Kelley. Despite the effects of childhood polio, Tom Kelley graduated from law school, entered private practice in Rockville, and became one of the most respected members of that profession in the county. In 1934, Kelley was elected Judge of the Montgomery County Orphan's Court, the first lawyer to serve in that capacity. He was instrumental in the change to the county council system of government in Montgomery County and served on the first elected council from 1948 to 1950. His widow, Catherine Merrill Kelley, continues to live in the lovely old house.

To his daughter, Elizabeth, Charles Gassaway left 505 acres of "Mount Pleasant," part of "Mitchell's Range," and "Promise Fulfilled" as well as part of Morton's Island in the Potomac. In 1798, Elizabeth Gassaway had married William Darne. One⁴ claim was that Darne was born at "Mountain View," at the foot of Sugar Loaf Mountain in Frederick County. However, a family of Darnes in Fairfax County, Virginia, claims relationship through a John Darne, Sr., and his wife, Mary Gunnell. Several of the Darnes moved to Virginia, which gives credence to this relationship.

1. Roger Brooke Farquhar, *Historic Montgomery County, Maryland, Old Homes and History* (Baltimore, MD: Monumental Printing Company, 1952), p. 253.

2. Montgomery County Deeds, Liber BS 2, f. 338.

3. Farquhar, *op.cit.*, p. 254.

4. T.H.S. Boyd, *The History of Montgomery County, Maryland, from Its Earliest Settlement in 1650 to 1879* (Baltimore, MD: Regional Publishing Company, 1968), p. 89.

William Darne and Elizabeth lived on part of the tract "Mount Pleasant" east of the house at "Pleasant Hills." He became very active in county affairs - a Judge of the Levy Court, a representative in the State Legislature, and a director of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. He was referred to by a contemporary as a man "distinguished for his hospitality and urbanity of manner."⁵ It was for William Darne that Darnestown was named. There is evidence that the town was originally called Mount Pleasant. However, when the Post Office came, the town took the name of the principal landowner and became known as Darnes or Darnes Town and finally Darnestown.

The first postmaster and merchant was John Candler. John Candler married Sarah Hays in 1804. The Candlers owned farmland on the west side of the Darnestown-Seneca Road and two lots in Darnestown which, for many years, were used as a store and tavern stand. Improvements on these lots included a dwelling house with attached kitchen, smoke house, stables, blacksmith shop, and schoolhouse. Descendents of the Candlers continued to live in Darnestown until the early 1900's.

The first wheelwright was Samuel Leeke. In 1820, Samuel Leeke purchased land from William Darne on the south side of Route 28 (then called the Road from Georgetown to the Mouth of the Monocacy). Here he had his home and plied his trade. He married Rebecca Candler, and they later moved away from the community. Richard Harper succeeded him as wheelwright.

An early blacksmith was John Dowd. He seems to be lost to the records of Montgomery County, but he was quickly followed by others. There was always at least one and sometimes two blacksmiths in town. The first tavern keeper was Andrew Barneyclois. Nothing is known of him except that his wife was Delilah Trundle.

An early physician in Darnestown was Benjamin Edwards. He was the son of Benjamin Edwards of an old Virginia family and Margaret Beall, another of Ninian Beall's daughters. Benjamin Edwards, Sr., had come to Montgomery County as a young man. A planter and merchant, he was a member of the State Legislature, a delegate to the State Convention of 1788 which ratified the Federal Constitution, and a member of the Third Congress of the United States, filling a vacancy caused by the resignation of Uriah Forest. Edwards was also a Justice or Judge of Montgomery County.

But stores and blacksmiths are not all it takes to make a town. The first church of which we have knowledge was a log building on a lot at the left where Route 118 to Germantown intersects Route 28. It was used by several denominations. For some time prior to 1855, the Presbyterians had been one of the denominations using this building. Then, on May 12, 1855, Reverend Daniel Motzer, the supply assigned to the Neelsville Presbyterian Church in 1854, officiated at the organization of the Darnestown Presbyterians as a "missionary point" of the Neelsville Church.⁶

5. *Ibid.*

6. The history of the Darnestown Presbyterian Church and of the Andrew Small Academy was taken primarily from "A History of the Darnestown Presbyterian Church" by John F. Wells, Jr., compiled for the Centennial Celebration, September 24-25, 1955.

The first aim of this organization was to have its own building. Major George Peter offered the congregation land on what is now Berryville Road. Intense debate ensued about whether or not to accept the gift. The site was not favored by the majority, primarily because it was so far from town, so the offer was turned down. Shortly thereafter, the church was offered three acres by John DuFief; this offer was accepted. John DuFief, son of a French immigrant, was a miller and large landowner who lived near Travilah, to the southeast of Darnestown.

The congregation numbered only 10 communicants so its taste in architecture had to be tempered by its pocketbook. It chose a style popular in public buildings of the day, Neo-Grecian, classic in line and simple in detail. The cornerstone was laid September 14, 1856. Papers, coins, and other mementos were reported to have been sealed in the stone with appropriate ceremonies. The completed building was dedicated on May 22, 1859. By this time 27 members were claimed, and a Missionary Society had been organized.

Alice Darby Nourse, an early member of the church, further describes the building of the church: "When the foundation was laid, the men hauled the stone. The women, not to be outdone, delved into their scrap bags and were organized to meet together to make strips of their colored material into large balls. These balls were sold to a rug company so the ladies could add their mite to the general fund.

"Finally the church was completed. Then the ladies were confronted with a problem. Carpet was needed for there were no furnaces then and the floor was cold. But there was no money. At length it was decided that each pew owner should bring his own strip of carpet from home. Our church floor soon bore the resemblance of a 'Joseph's Coat.' Mrs. A's strip of carpet was red, while just back of it Mrs. B's shone a golden yellow, and Mrs. C's across the aisle was a purplish hue."

The original church ended where the present-day chancel begins. At the rear the bell tower and church parlor were added about the turn of the century. The basement of the church had a separate entrance at the side of the building. Presbyterians, always a denomination concerned with education, used the basement as a small parochial school from the beginning, as well as for Sunday School. Mr. Burr was the first teacher; he had one assistant.

At about this time there was a rift in the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Before the Civil War, a "New School" liberalism was chosen by some congregations; "Old School" churches formed the Confederate Church. Nearby churches in Rockville and Poolesville chose the latter. Somehow the Darnestown congregation, not necessarily reflecting the political views of its members, remained in the Northern Church, or Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. Black communicants were received into membership, and there is a small balcony or gallery where these members sat.

The first period of the church's history came to an end with the death of its founding minister, Reverend Daniel Motzer, on November 1, 1864 at the age of 46. He had labored for 10 years in the Neelsville-Darnestown community and was paid by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions.

The Reverend J.S.H. Henderson was then appointed supply to the church. His stay covered the years 1865 to 1870, six stormy years that covered not only the war years but years of financial problems and of strained relations with the Neelsville branch of the church.

In December 1865, Frederick A. Tschiffely, elder of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church and a friend of the Darnestown congregation, brought news that his friend, Andrew Small, wished to give money to the church. Mr. Small, a native of Scotland, had been a contractor on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in the vicinity. There he had laid the foundation of his moderate fortune. There he became acquainted with the community. He admired the efforts of the people to improve their educational facilities. Therefore he gave them \$5000, stipulating that the principal not be used, that the interest be directed to the part payment of the pastor's salary, and that a site be chosen for a parsonage and a home erected for a pastor who would devote at least three-quarters of his time to work in the Darnestown community.

This offer precipitated a conflict with the Neelsville Church over the location of the manse. It was resolved in time, and the manse was built on land which had been acquired adjoining the original three acres, east of the church building. The minister's home was completed in February 1870. By this time the Presbytery had agreed that each branch was to have its own minister and that the earnings of the Andrew Small Fund were to be divided between the two branches.

In the meantime, in 1867, Andrew Small died. He is buried in the Darnestown Presbyterian Cemetery, where his grave is marked by a tall shaft. He left no widow or children but the princely sum of \$35,000 to the community. With this second gift, the Andrew Small Academy was founded.

Since the trustees had no corporate standing, an Act of Legislature was required to grant them power to conduct business as "Trustees of the Andrew Small Academy of Darnestown, Md." The trustees had their first meeting in June 1867. They elected Frederick A. Tschiffely president, Nathaniel Clagett treasurer, and George R. Rice secretary. The fund they administered was invested in bonds of Washington City with a low interest yield. A later treasurer, James S. Windsor, reinvested the funds and greatly increased the income.

The Academy did not wait for its building but opened for pupils in September 1867 with Reverend Parke Poindexter Flournoy as teacher and one assistant. But there were problems! The parsonage was nearly finished in late 1868, and Mr. Easterday, the contractor for the Academy building, had permission to live in the incompleated house. There was a succession of teachers, each of whom stayed but a short time. Reverend Henderson knew he was to leave. And there were financial complications. Although the school moved into its new building in 1869, it was forced to close for the year 1871.

The Andrew Small Academy reopened in 1872 and remained in operation until 1907. It placed Darnestown ahead of neighboring communities in terms of educational facilities. In those days an education at college-preparatory level was rare in rural areas. Quickly the Andrew Small Academy established a reputation which attracted boarding students as well as day students. The third floor was outfitted as living quarters for students and teachers. Some of the local families went to considerable sacrifice to send their children to the Academy.

Until 1892, the minister of the church was the principal of the Academy. The first full-time principal was Professor William Nelson; he remained for seven years. Succeeding principals were David Jaquette, Frank Andrews, W.F. McIlwee, and M.L. Fearnow.



Andrew Small Academy

In 1907, the Academy was closed, and the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners of Public Schools took over the building as part of the county public high-school system. The trustees of the Andrew Small Academy continued to maintain the building and to pay a part of the principal's salary. In 1927, after 20 years as a three-year public high school, the county converted the building to an elementary school, using only the bottom floor for grades 1 through 6.

Then, in January 1955, the following appeared in the newspaper to announce the removal of the Academy building which was being replaced by a new school: "The 75-year-old Darnestown Elementary School building ... will be torn down sometime next month, the Montgomery County School Board has decided. The Board awarded a \$750 contract to William Mossburg to raze the old building which will be replaced February 1 by the new \$207,000 ... school a few hundred feet from the old structure. The school building originally housed the Andrew Small Academy, a private school attended by Dr. Edwin W. Broome, who retired as Montgomery County School Superintendent two years ago."⁷

With the demolition of the building, the community lost more than a school. The building had also served as a cultural and social gathering place. Commencements, class plays, recitation nights, award nights, and other social functions were attended by many in the area. Andrew Small's gift was felt by every man, woman, and child in the community.

7. *The Evening Star*, Washington, D.C., January 20, 1955, p. B-13.

The Civil War also had its impact on the quiet rural town of Darnestown. Only imagination can tell us what the political feelings between families as well as within families must have been. Loyalties were divided between the North and the South in this part of Montgomery County. But the Union soldiers came to town. General Nathaniel Banks had his headquarters in Darnestown for many months. The artist, David Strother, using the name Porte Crayon, was there and made sketches which were printed in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Some Civil War soldiers are supposed to be buried in the cemetery of the Presbyterian Church, but they were victims of sickness not battle casualties.

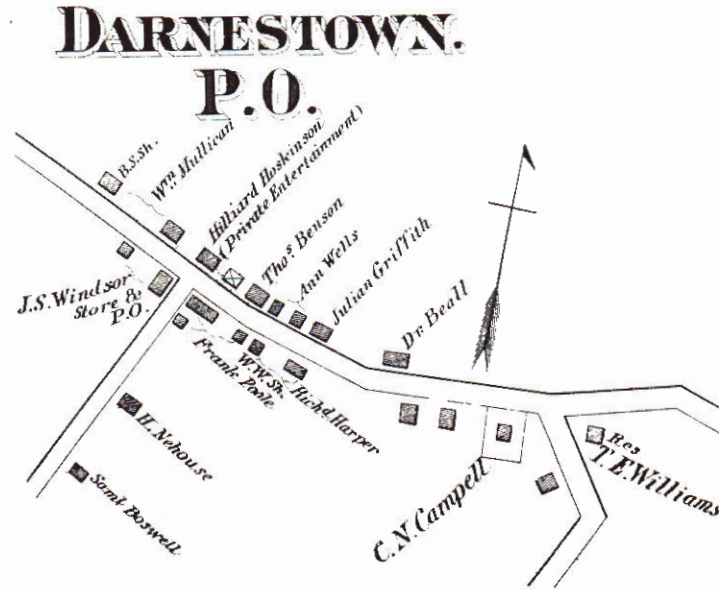
Mr. Claude Owens, grandson of Samuel T. Magruder who lived on what is now the Iler farm on Seneca Road, tells this story about his grandfather's farm during the war. "The farm overlooked the river and it bristled with cannon and fortifications - just waiting for the Rebs to ford the Potomac at Seneca. Mrs. Magruder had a nephew, Colonel Nicholas Dorsey, who was captured and held prisoner at Baltimore. Somehow he managed to escape. Still in remnants of his uniform, he traveled at night through the back roads of Maryland until he reached the Magruder farm. Little did he know that General Banks and a sizable army were heading for the same place. The very day after Colonel Nick arrived, hungry and tired, the General arrived. Again the Colonel was a prisoner. During the confusion of assigning quarters and locating various sites for the units, the Confederate Colonel decided it was a good time to leave. He dressed in one of Mr. Magruder's civilian suits, calmly walked down the steps, waved to the sentries, ambled down the driveway, and caught a ride on a wagon to Seneca where he was rowed across the river to safety."

After the Civil War, Darnestown became one of those Montgomery County communities which were more populous and prosperous then than they were after the turn of the century. In 1871, the population of the towns in the county ranked in this order:

Rockville	297
Sandy Spring	207
Poolesville	180
Clarksburg	153
Damascus	126
Laytonsville	108
Darcy's Store (Bethesda)	108
Hyattstown	99
Darnestown	99

Boyd⁸ gives a population of 200 in the Darnestown area in 1879. The inhabitants of the town at that time are recorded in G.M. Hopkins' Atlas from which the map reproduced here is taken. Let us now meet a few of the residents of this thriving crossroads community.

8. Boyd, *op.cit.*, p. 126.



Map of Darnestown, 1879, from Hopkins' Atlas

On the right as one approached the crossroads coming from Rockville was the home of Dr. and Mrs. Richard Beall. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* of October 1866 shows their house as a story and a half "cottage" among trees and vines. There was a main section and two additions of decreasing size with a steep roof slanting to the ground in the back. Richard Beall had married Cecelia Darne in 1831. This lot in Darnestown was part of the land that Cecelia had inherited from her mother, Elizabeth Gassaway Darne. Dr. Beall was the physician for the community. He died in 1879 at the age of 75.⁹

In 1865, Samuel M. Fisher owned the building next to the Bealls' house. With his brother-in-law, James N. Benton, he was a merchant trading as Fisher and Benton. This was their store, and Fisher was a postmaster of Darnestown. In 1868, Samuel Fisher sold the building and land to Ulysses Griffith and James S. Windsor who had been renting the property for a while previously. Ulysses Griffith had purchased a share to set up his son, Julian, in business. Griffith and Windsor became the merchants of the town. Then, after about 10 years, they dissolved the partnership, and Windsor moved to the southwest corner of the intersection of Darnestown Road and Seneca Road. Here he built a large store and house. They were connected through a doorway in the hall, and their mutual porch was divided by a railing. The changes in the times were reflected in subtle changes in the merchandise sold in the store. The candy counter filled with jars of chocolate babies, licorice whips, and stick candy later added soft drinks and commercial ice cream; the bolts of cloth and spools of thread declined; canned goods were augmented by bakery bread; nails and tools were sold and, with the advent of the automobile, came the outside gasoline pump. A post office occupied part of the store for some time.

9. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, January 10, 1879.

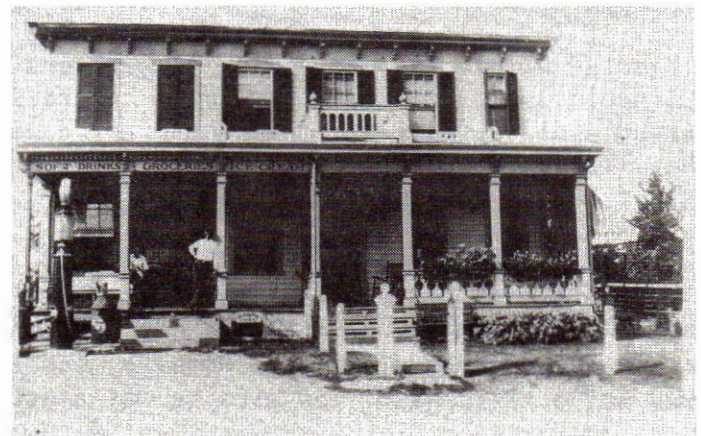
Darnestown, As It Was,
Looking West on Route 28

Building in right fore-
ground was Julian Griffith
store.



Richard Beall House,
As Sketched by
Porte Crayon

James S. Windsor Store



James S. Windsor had interests other than his mercantile business. He had an interest in the Gaithersburg Milling and Manufacturing Company. He was a director of the First National Bank of Gaithersburg in whose incorporation he had an active part. He was on the Board of Trustees for the Andrew Small Academy and was a trustee and treasurer of the Presbyterian Church at Darnestown. For over 25 years he served as an elder. A Republican in politics, he never sought an elective office, but the political appointment of postmaster was a position he held for more than 20 years. Mrs. Windsor, Sarah Rebecca Darby, was also an active person in the community. She was instrumental in the organization of the Darnestown Woman's Club and actively involved in the church. The Darnestown Woman's Club was organized as the Mutual Improvement Club. In 1905, it became one of the original members of the Montgomery County Federation of Women's Clubs.

On the Darnestown Road west of James Windsor lived Philip Reed, a blacksmith who came to Darnestown from Poolesville. In 1880, Philip Reed bought this lot from Windsor on which he built his house. His blacksmith shop stood beside the house. Reed's sons, Edgar and Lewis, became the owners of Reed Brothers Dodge and Plymouth agency in Rockville. The house was later owned by Kelley Rice who ran the farm at "Pleasant Hills."

Dr. Beall was succeeded as Darnestown doctor by Dr. Charles Nourse. Charles Nourse was born in Washington, D.C., grew up at Seneca where his father, Reverend Charles Nourse, was tutor to the children of John Parke Custis Peter, and was receiving an excellent preparation for Princeton College when the Civil War broke out. Although he was but 17 years old, he enlisted in the Confederate Army in White's Battalion of Cavalry, Company A. After the war, he studied medicine with Dr. Maddox in Rockville; in June 1869, he graduated from the Medical School of Georgetown University. He began practice in Washington but came to Darnestown in 1870. Here he met, or renewed acquaintances with, and married Alice Darby. In 1875, they returned to Washington, mainly on account of his father's failing health. There he entered the drug business and continued to reside until 1882. But he never gave up intentions of returning to Darnestown. After coming back to his home on the east side of Seneca Road, he practiced medicine throughout the upper part of the county for the next 35 years. He was retained by the Seneca Stone Quarries for their employees and was on the county Board of Health.

No story of Darnestown would be complete without mention of "Montanverde." Sometime between 1806 and 1812, this house was built by Major George Peter of Georgetown as a summer home. The house faces south toward a tributary of Seneca Creek. It is built of brick but has a facing of clapboard. The center section is two storied with a one-story wing on each end. The wing on the west is known as the Lincoln Room. Abraham Lincoln, a congressman at the time, is supposed to have attended a political rally that the Major gave during the campaign of 1848 between Zachary Taylor and Lewis Cass. Lincoln stayed overnight, and tradition says that he slept in the west wing.¹⁰

In 1815, Major George Peter was elected to the Fourteenth Congress from the Sixth District of Maryland (Montgomery, Frederick, Allegany, and Garrett Counties), to succeed Alexander Contee Hanson who had resigned. He was the first Democrat to be elected from that district. However, his seat was contested on the grounds that he was not a resident of the area he was elected to represent. He was considered a

10. Farquhar, *op.cit.*, p. 217-218.

resident of Georgetown and was a member of the Georgetown Town Council. The House of Representatives, nevertheless, voted to seat him on the basis of the large amount of land he owned in Montgomery County. Major Peter was re-elected to the Fifteenth Congress and served from October 7, 1816 to March 3, 1819. Then, from 1819 to 1827, he served in the State House of Delegates. He again became a member of Congress in 1828 but was defeated in his bid for re-election. In 1855, he was elected by the Democratic Party as a commissioner of Public Works for the State of Maryland.

Major Peter was married three times and had 16 children. When he died in 1861, he left the use of "Montanverde" and 50 acres to the children of his third wife for a period of 10 years. After that it was to be sold. Since the other children were settled in their own homes by the time he died, his daughter, Sarah Agnes Peter, who never married, occupied "Montanverde." The house was sold to William Barnum, the brother of P.T. Barnum of circus fame. In 1916, it was sold to Frank Harmon, Sr. "Montanverde" is still owned by the Harmon family.

Among the farmers in the area whose names appear in the Hopkins Atlas of 1879 were Rudolph Beall, James Nathaniel Benton, Nathaniel Clagett, Joseph Estworthy, Judson Fields, Hillary Higgins, Zepheniah Nathan Jones, William T. Lewis, Thomas Magruder, Elbert Perry, James W. Purdom, William H. Rice, Martin Thompson, James Tschiffely, Charles Vinson, William H. Vinson, and Mary Jane West, widow of Tilghman West. While few of their descendants still live in the Darnestown area, most of their names are easily recognized as old Montgomery County names. And, while only a few of the buildings that once lined Darnestown and Seneca Roads remain, the town still is a reminder of by-gone days.