

The Onset of Industry

passage from A History of Baltimore County

Neal A. Brooks

Eric G. Rockel

The development of the steel mill at Sparrows Point ushered in a new phase of industrial growth that continued into the twentieth century. Nearly gone were the days of the small rural gristmill and the multi-storied textile mill. These creatures of the early nineteenth century were replaced by industrial plants that reflected modern technology.

The Black and Decker Manufacturing Company, which moved from Baltimore City to Towson in 1917-18, was representative of the new industrial growth of the twentieth century. Black and Decker produced a pistol grip, one-half inch electric drill, revolutionary for its time, which reaped instant financial success on the commercial market. Soon the company

undertook development of other portable power tools. Today, Black and Decker's plant size has multiplied manifold because of the worldwide demand for their products, and its corporate wealth includes diverse subsidiary companies in America and foreign countries.

Locally important was the dramatic growth experienced by Harry T. Campbell Sons' Corporation in the 1920s and 1930s. Campbell began his quarry and contracting business in 1891 with a six-man operation on Harford Road. After their father's death, sons H. Guy and Bruce Campbell took over the company in 1922. In 1926 the firm acquired its Texas quarry, and in 1931 built a Camelite plant to produce concrete. It was during the 1920s that Campbell's began building many of the county's highways and became a prominent company on the state level. Property acquisition at White Marsh and a concrete plant on Pulaski Highway followed in the 1930s. Campbell's continues a lucrative construction business as a subsidiary of the Flintkote Corporation.

Following the repeal of prohibition the Calvert Distilling Company built a plant on Washington Boulevard near Relay. Expansion throughout the 1930s made this plant one of the largest and best equipped in the country. At that time its daily production of liquor was 44,000 gallons.”

The Patapsco and Back River Necks received the greatest boost of any area when an agent for Glenn L. Martin purchased about 1,200 acres in the Middle River area in 1929. Martin selected Middle River for the site of his aircraft plant because of its proximity to Baltimore and Washington, its access to rail facilities and the good, year-round flying weather. Local exemption of plant machinery from taxation also encouraged Martin to locate in the county. In March 1929 more than 2,000 sightseers visited the Martin property to witness construction, and before the end of the year the first Buildings were completed, containing 298,000 square feet of factory space.

By the middle of June 1930, Martin's was building thirty boat-type patrol airplanes (the PM-1), and the firm had received a U.S. Navy contract for twenty-five more aircraft valued at \$1,396,451. After the depression-created employment slump of the mid-1930s, Martin's rebounded when new demands from Europe and this nation filled its order books. Kingsville's Ken Ebel, a vice-president of the engineering department, played an important part in the development of the China Clipper, a now-classic flying boat. As Martin's most accomplished test pilot, he was the first to fly the China Clipper, and Phillipine, Soviet, and Hawaiian Clippers soon followed the prototype. By 1939 Martin's employed 4,100 workers, and the firm had invested about \$12 million in its Middle River plant since 1929.