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Cover Page Footnote

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ODE TO A LUNCH BOWL: THE ATLANTIC LUNCH AS AN INTERFACE BETWEEN ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MARYLAND, AND WASHINGTON, D.C.

George L. Miller

How far does the sense of community extend? That question is generally beyond the reach of archaeology because one's sense of being part of, or belonging to, a community is more of a state of mind rather than something that can be observed or recovered through excavation. However, occasionally an artifact, in this case a bowl from the Atlantic Lunch of Washington D.C., is recovered in a context that can shed some light on the subject. For purposes of this paper, the concept of community is the feeling of identification that one has with a neighborhood, village, county, or geographic area.

Institutions such as clubs, churches, political parties and in some cases business establishments, can be small communities in-and-of-themselves or be an extension of a broader community. This paper will examine the role of the Atlantic Lunch restaurant of Washington D.C. which was an extension of St. Mary's County, Maryland, for over half a century.

Some background information about St. Mary's County will be useful in understanding how a tightly knit community established and maintained outposts in Washington, Baltimore and Alexandria. St. Mary's City was settled in 1634 and was the capital of Lord Baltimore's Maryland until 1695. After the capital was moved to Annapolis in 1695, St. Mary's City became a ghost town and remained a stable rural area until World War II. The county is a peninsula bound on one side by the Patuxent River and Chesapeake Bay and on the other side by the Potomac River. Its main economic activities

have been agriculture and fishing with almost no industrial development.

The population of St. Mary's county from 1790 to 1940 ranged from 13,000 to 17,000 people, almost equally split between blacks and whites. The percentage of foreign born during this period in the county never reached two percent and in most census years it was less than one percent (Table I). Leonardtown, the county seat and largest village in St. Mary's County, did not number over 700 people before World War II.

A feeling for the stability of the area is gained by the family names, such as Fenwick, Blackistone, Raley, Clocker, Hammett, Ridgell, Abell, Stone, Hurry, Dorsey, Norris, and Tippet, which occur over and over again in three centuries of St. Mary's county records. These old families consider themselves "county" and one does not become "county" by such a minor thing as living there for a couple of generations. In the past, non-residents of the county were referred to as foreigners.

During World War II the equilibrium of the county changed when the Patuxent Naval Air Station was built in Lexington Park. From the war on, there was a heavy influx of people moving into St. Mary's County and the sense of community underwent a change as the Navy became the largest employer in the area.

The county had a long tradition of brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, and uncles moving to Washington and maintaining strong ties back home. Many county families made trips to Washington and Baltimore for fall clothing purchases and stayed with relatives. Zachariah Blackistone, who left St. Mary's County in 1890, said in an interview in 1975 that he never heard of anyone coming to Washington staying in a hotel and that county folks generally had relatives with whom they could stay (Kregloh 1977:96).

Because there was almost no industrial development in the county before the Naval base was built, those sons and daughters who were surplus to the labor needs of the farm or as watermen left for careers in urban areas. For St. Mary's County, Washington was the closest large city. It was

TABLE 1

POPULATION: ST. MARY'S COUNTY, MARYLAND, 1790-1940*

	Popula- tion Total	Number of Whites	Percentage of Population	Number of Blacks	Percentage of Population	Number Foreign Born	Percentage of Population	Population of Leonardtown
1790	15,544	8,216	52.9%	7,328	47.1%			
1800	13,699	6,678	48.9%	7,021	51.1%			
1810	12,794	6,158	48.1%	6,636	51.9%			
1820	12,794	6,033	46.5%	6,941	53.5%			
1830	13,459	6,097	45.3%	7,362	54.7%			
1840	13,224	6,070	45.9%	7,154	54.1%			
1850	13,698	6,223	45.4%	7,475	54.6%			
1860	15,213	6,798	44.7%	8,415	53.3%	73	0.48%	
1870	14,944	7,218	48.3%	7,726	51.7%	84	0.56%	485
1880	16,934	8,244	48.7%	8,690	51.3%	62	0.39%	465
1890	15,819	8,153	51.5%	7,666	48.5%	66	0.42%	521
1900	17,182	8,926	51.9%	8,256	48.1%	75	0.44%	463
1910	17,030	9,726	57.1%	7,304	42.9%	171	1.00%	526
1920	16,112	9,674	60.0%	6,438	40.0%	205	1.27%	557
1930	15,189	9,597	63.2%	5,592	36.8%	138	0.91%	697
1940	14,626	9,901	67.7%	4,724	32.3%	99	0.68%	

*Data compiled from United States Census Publications for St. Mary's County, Maryland, published in 1866, 1872, 1883, 1895, 1902, 1913, 1922, 1932 and 1943.

between 40 and 70 miles distant from different points in the county.

In addition to family connections, there were commercial institutions in Washington and Baltimore that catered to county needs and listed St. Mary's County salespersons that worked for their establishments in their advertisements in the St. Mary's Beacon (Kregloh 1977:98). The Atlantic Lunch was an institution that had very strong ties with the county; it functioned as an interface between the two communities for over half a century (Figure 1).

Well-established rural communities near urban centers created ties with those cities which went well beyond economics. Rural areas have a long tradition of sending their surplus sons and daughters to cities to seek careers. Extended farm families with kinfolk in nearby cities naturally had connections which eased the path of those leaving the farm for the employment opportunities of the city. Having a city cousin gave the

rural emigre a place to head for and a friendly guide to the wiles of city life, employment, services, shelter and society. City cousins were an interface between urban and rural communities. In addition to family ties, there also appear to have been commercial establishments that served as focal points for residents of rural communities when they traveled to the city.

One such establishment, the Atlantic Lunch of Washington, D.C., was a focal point for the residents of St. Mary's County, Maryland, for over half a century. Serendipity was the major factor drawing our attention to this institution. A soup bowl from the Atlantic Lunch was recovered from the post-occupation fill of the cellar of the Moses Tabb House, Popes Freehold, St. Mary's City, Maryland (Miller 1974).

Little attention was paid to the bowl because it was from post-occupation fill that came from an unknown source. Interest in the bowl by the St. Mary's City Commission

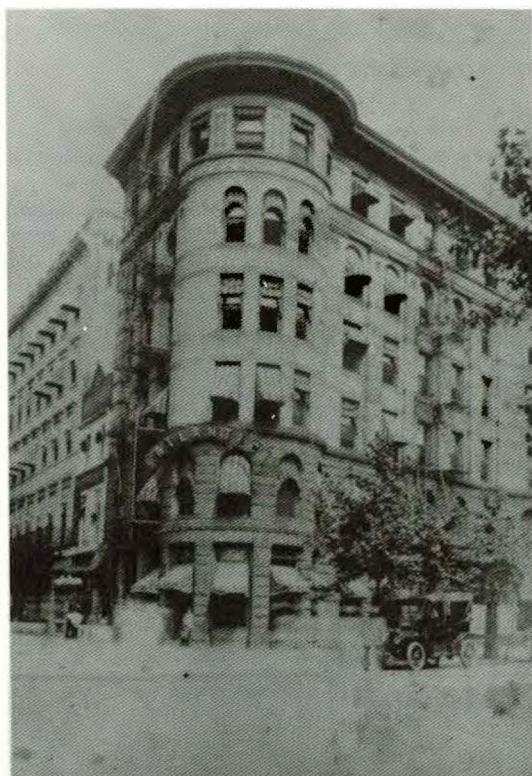


Figure 1. The Atlantic Hotel around the First World War. Until about 1925, the Atlantic Lunch was located in the Atlantic Hotel. Photograph from Mrs. Harry C. Dalton.

was piqued when it was identified by Charles Fenwick, one of the commissioners. Mr. Fenwick is a native son of St. Mary's County, and when he saw the bowl, his eyes lit up and he exclaimed, "Ah yes, the Atlantic Lunch, an old St. Mary's County meeting place in Washington" (Fenwick 1975). He said that the restaurant was owned by Charlie Carroll from St. Mary's County and that the place was well known by people from the county.

Mr. Fenwick said that when he was a boy in the 1920s, he would get up early in the morning and catch a ride to Washington from the truck delivering bread to the country stores. Washington was about 45 miles from Leonardtown where Mr. Fenwick lived. After taking in a show and wandering around Washington, he would head over to the Atlantic Lunch and hang around wait-

ing to find someone driving down to St. Mary's County. There was enough traffic to and from the Atlantic Lunch that he could depend on picking up a ride home. Mr. Fenwick gave me names of others who were familiar with the Atlantic Lunch and I mounted serendipity for a pleasant and informative ride.

How did this interface get started and what functions did it fulfill? After Charles Fenwick told me what he knew about the Atlantic Lunch, he put me in contact with Thomas S. Long of River Springs, St. Mary's County. Mr. Long said that he left the county in 1911 and got his first job at age 19 working for Charlie Carroll at the Atlantic Lunch for \$6.00 a week plus board. In the County, Mr. Long said that the best he could earn back in 1911 was twenty-five to fifty cents a day and there were more brothers than were needed to work the family farm. After working for about a year-and-a-half for the Atlantic Lunch, he got a better paying job on the trolley lines. Upon retiring, he moved back to St. Mary's County. When Mr. Long worked at the Atlantic Lunch in 1911, it was owned by Willie Hall and managed by Charlie Carroll.

Another very good informant was Margaret Carroll Dalton, who is the niece of Charles Carroll. Mrs. Dalton has some of her Uncle Charlie's papers, family genealogical information, and rich memories which fill in some of the gaps. Charlie Carroll was born in 1882 and, according to Mrs. Dalton, left the county as a young man to work for a tobacco company. That company may have been Hall Star Cigar Company owned by Charlie's maternal cousin, William Hall, who was known as Willie. Willie was born in the County in 1870, which would have made him twelve years older than Charlie. As mentioned earlier, according to Mr. Long, Charlie was managing the Atlantic Lunch for Willie Hall by at least 1911. A 1904 marriage license in the possession of Mrs. Dalton, issued in Washington, D.C. to Charles Carroll and Olga V. Rosey, suggests that Charlie was living in Washington by that date.



Figure 2. The inscription on the inside rim of the Atlantic Lunch bowl.

The Atlantic Lunch was located in the Atlantic Hotel until around 1925. Willie and Charlie did not leave their association with the county to word-of-mouth. The following advertisement was placed in the St. Mary's Beacon in December of 1914 and continued to run for several months:

Atlantic Hotel
6th St. and Penn. Ave. N.W.
Washington, D.C.
THIS HOTEL is in the heart
of the business section
of Washington, the most
ideal place in the city to
stop. You will meet here
all your southern Maryland
friends

ST. MARY'S COUNTY HEADQUARTERS Atlantic Hotel

Just when Willie Hall sold the restaurant to Charlie Carroll is not clear. According to Mrs. Dalton, Charlie initially had three partners, one of whom was his brother William, who also went by the name Willie. The two other partners were Dr. Robert B. Bacon from Virginia and Mr. Robert A. Rollins who had a grocery store on 11th and M Streets in southeast Washington. The latter two partners were financial backers. How long Willie Carroll was in business is not known. Robert Rollins died just before World War II and Dr. Bacon sold his interests in the business to Charlie in 1957.

A fourth informant about the Atlantic Lunch was Mrs. Burton (Maud) Russell. Before getting married and moving to Wash-

ington, Maud taught school in St. Mary's County. Her first job in Washington was in the Atlantic Hotel above the Atlantic Lunch in 1925. One busy afternoon, Uncle Charlie asked her to help out in the restaurant. From then until it closed in 1964 she worked there, mostly as the cashier.

Mrs. Russell was able to provide some information on the Atlantic Lunch bowl that we had excavated. The sherds to the bowl contain part of a maker's mark that reads:

CA—CHINA
E.—DAMS CO.
HOTEL DEPT.

When I asked Maud if she could remember who supplied the Atlantic Lunch with its hotel ware, she answered, without having to hesitate, "E. B. Adams Company of Washington" (Figure 2). E. B. Adams was founded in 1902 and is still in business. A company representative said the bowl was made by Carr China Company which went out of business after the Second World War.

When asked to describe the relationship between the restaurant and the county, Maud Russell said:

The Atlantic Lunch was the first place they landed when they left the county. Uncle Charlie, he would help them find a job or create one for them until something came up.

Often this involved finding them a place to stay, which sometimes meant a cot in the storeroom above the restaurant. Both Mrs. Russell and Mrs. Dalton said that if Uncle Charlie was short of help, he would drive down to the county on the weekend and recruit a new employee. From what my informants have said, Uncle Charlie's wages were significantly better than what could be earned by a laborer in the county, but, being a restaurant, not particularly high for what could be earned in Washington.

For many young men making the transition from the county to the city, the Atlantic Lunch acted as a kind of friendly Ellis Island, or a safe haven where they could find a job, shelter and help in adjusting to city life. Even the black population of St. Mary's County participated in this pattern. Henry

Johnson and Raymond Hawkins were two black cooks from the county who worked for many years at the Atlantic Lunch. Before the restaurant was integrated, county blacks either ate in the kitchen or picked up food to go.

The Atlantic Lunch was open 24 hours a day. Employees included two or three cooks, a couple of waiters behind the counter, two or three busboys and the cashier. Almost all of the employees were from St. Mary's County.

Another way in which the bonds were maintained was through the purchase of eggs, country produce, hams, sausage, oysters, fish and crabs from the county. Some of those mentioned by informants as supplying the Atlantic Lunch included Charlie's family, Benny McKay, Joe and Warren Dunbar. In addition to buying produce and meat from the county, the Atlantic Lunch served country dishes including southern Maryland stuffed ham.

In short, the Atlantic Lunch had close economic, social and kinship ties with the community in St. Mary's County. It served as a place for residents of the county to meet in the city and have a pleasant meal among friends and neighbors or perhaps find a ride back down to the county. For those making the move off the farm into the city it was a potential job and an introduction to urban ways. Finally, for those working in the city, it provided a place where one could keep up on the latest information from home.

The Atlantic Lunch functioned as an outpost for St. Mary's County for over half a century. By the late 1950s, Uncle Charlie was getting old, as were several of his employees who had been with him for years. It became increasingly difficult for him to run the business. A letter to Uncle Charlie from his partner Dr. Robert B. Bacon dated April 27th, 1957 summed up the problems. The lease for the building was due for renewal for five years at \$350.00 a month. Dr. Bacon did not want to enter into a new lease for which he would be responsible in the event that anything happened to Uncle Charlie and he concluded his letter as follows:

The Atlantic Lunch has not shown a profit since you became incapacitated by age. For over five years I have received nothing although others have made a living out of it. I would like to sell out for \$1500.00.

Uncle Charlie kept the business open for another seven years at which point he was 82 years old. In 1964 Maud Russell convinced Charlie that it was an uphill battle and he sold the restaurant. The new owner changed the name to the Kansas Beef House and the outpost for St. Mary's County was no more.

The Atlantic Lunch was not a unique institution. Other well established rural communities located close to large cities probably developed similar outposts. There was at least one other in Washington for St. Mary's County. Blackistone's Flower Shop at 1407 H Street N.W. was another institution frequented by county residents for over half a century. Zachariah Deminie Blackistone was born in Charlotte Hall, St. Mary's County, on February 16th, 1871. "When he was still a youth his mother urged him to take a riverboat to Washington to seek his fortune working for the government" (Smith 1982:136). He left the county in 1890 and opened a florist shop in Washington in 1898. Mr. Blackistone ran his flower shop until 1976 at which time he was 105 years old and even from his retirement home he kept in daily contact until his death at age 111. After living over 80 years of his life in Washington, Mr. Blackistone still considered himself a county boy and his contact with the county was extensive. Many older residents in St. Mary's County mention Blackistone's Flower Shop as a place they commonly visited when shopping in Washington. More research on Blackistone's Flower Shop would probably duplicate some of the patterns outlined for the Atlantic Lunch.

Serendipity played a significant role in exposing the relationship between the Atlantic Lunch and St. Mary's County. If Charles Fenwick had not seen the Atlantic Lunch bowl, we at the St. Mary's City Commission would have just written it off as a

trophy someone liberated from a restaurant. It is difficult to see how archaeology can consistently address questions such as the sense of community and the relationship between service institutions and rural communities. However once in a while serendipity places a clue in our hands. If you find artifacts from urban institutions in rural contexts, it may be worthwhile to check and see if the institution had a special relationship with the community or site you are investigating.

The unfortunate thing about serendipity is that for many archaeologist it is their only sense of direction—which is the equivalent of having no direction at all. Serendipity cannot be a replacement for a sustained series of intelligent questions addressing significant issues; however, neither can it be written off.

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