NAMING THE STREETS
of
Cumberland, Maryland

MANY OF THE STREET NAMES REMAIN IN USE AFTER MORE THAN 200 YEARS OF SERVICE.

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**

Several decades ago Dr. Harry Stegmaier, history professor at Frostburg State University, graciously provided me with a copy of a Cumberland map dated 1806. The drawing immediately caught my attention and became a treasured document. Prior to the availability of online resources such information was not readily accessible, and I was more than grateful for the gift. The map proved to be useful and a topic of conversation among local historians.

One of the most interesting aspects of the drawing concerns the street names that remain in use after more than 200 years of service. It is apparent the city has largely remained faithful to the original layout.

Early municipal officials chose to honor nationally known individuals for service to their country, while more recent street names identified with local families involved in real estate developments. Regardless of the time period the derivation of Cumberland's street names, while not a topic that one typically thinks about, is a fascinating subject that reflects national and local events.

Revolutionary War heroes remained foremost in the minds of city officials when naming the first streets. George Washington, Major General Nathaniel Greene, Major General Henry Lee III, Major General William Smallwood, Captain Thomas Beall, Brigadier General Thomas Johnson and Marquis de LaFayette were given top priorities.

William Paca and Samuel Chase, signatories from Maryland to the Declaration of Independence, were honored with street names located near the center of town. The third president and patriot, Thomas

Jefferson, enjoyed notoriety along North Mechanic Street until the lane was replaced by the development of North Centre Street.

More utilitarian and obvious names related to the locations of facilities—Mechanic, Mill and Market Streets. Tree-themed alleys of Chestnut, White Oak, Hickory, Apple, Peach and Pear, located near what would become the general area of North Centre Street, have mostly disappeared from the landscape.

Conspicuously absent in 1806 was Cumberland's thoroughfare of Baltimore Street—it is identified as Bedford Street. If that is not confusing enough for today's residents, nearby Blocker Street later became known as Bedford Street.
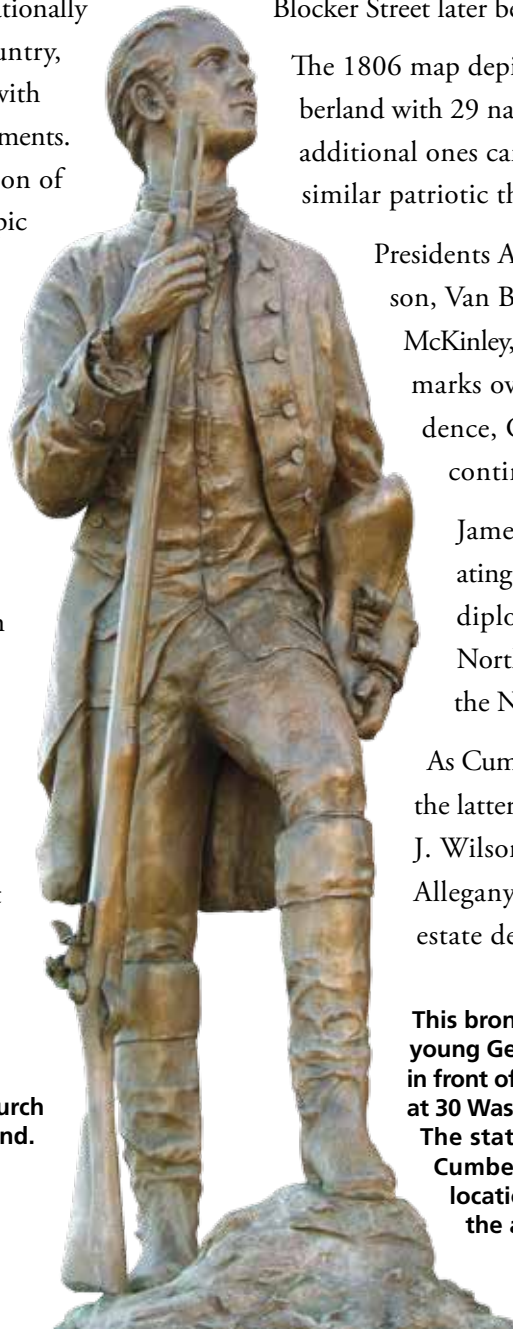
The 1806 map depicted a sparsely populated Cumberland with 29 named streets, but as the city grew additional ones came into existence and reflected similar patriotic themes.

Presidents Adams, Monroe, Jackson, Harrison, Van Buren, Polk, Lincoln, Cleveland, McKinley, and Harding streets became landmarks over the years. Liberty, Independence, Columbia, and Union streets continued the patriotic trend.

James Madison Street, commemorating a founding father, president, and diplomat, lost its designation when North Centre Street extended toward the Narrows.

As Cumberland expanded rapidly during the latter part of the nineteenth century, J. Wilson Humbird emerged as one of Allegany County's most influential real estate developers. His Humbird Land
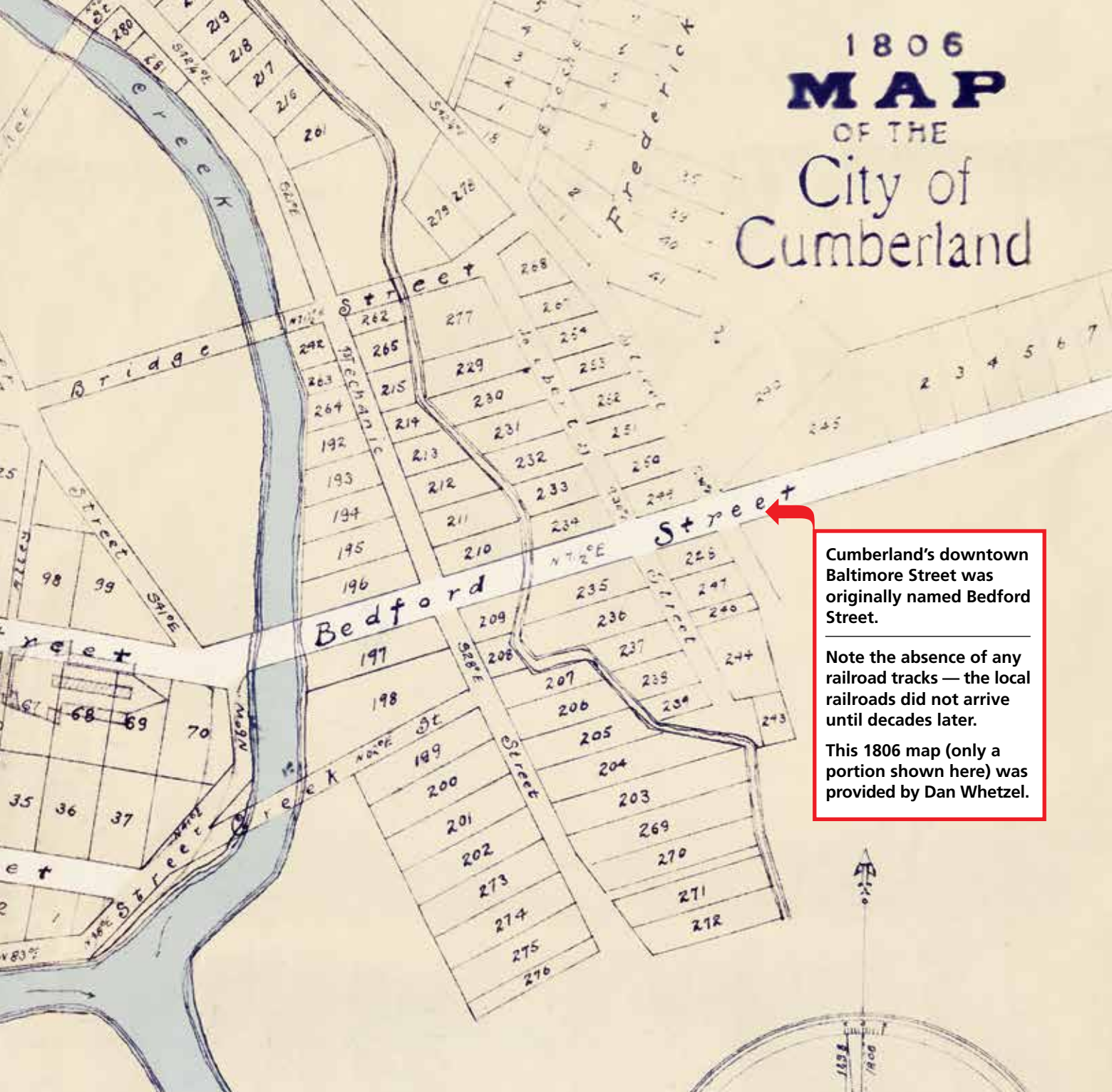
Facing page: View of Washington Street looking west near Emmanuel Episcopal Church and the approximate site of Fort Cumberland. The Allegany County Courthouse is in the background on the left (pointed spires).
BOTH PHOTOS BY LANCE C. BELL

This bronze statue, *The Visionary*, of young George Washington can be viewed in front of the Allegany County Courthouse at 30 Washington Street, Cumberland, MD. The statue is on the site of the Fort Cumberland parade grounds and the location of Washington's last visit to the area in 1794.

Cumberland Street

164 163 162 161 160 159 158 157 156 155 154 153 152 151 150 149
165 166 167 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145 146 147 148

Fayette Street S83½°E

170 169 168 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124
172 171 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 15 96 97

Washington Street S83½°E

174 173 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65
176 175 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 66

Green Street S83½°E

178 177 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5
180 179 52 51 50 49 48 47 46 45 44 43 42 41 40 39 38

Chase Street Walnut Street Lee Street Spruce Street Mechanic Street

Paca Street

181 83 82 81 80 79 78 77 76 75 74 73 72 71
182 183 110 109 108 107 106 105 104 103 102 101 100

Beall Street S83½°E

135 134 133 132 131 130 129 128 127 126

Flat Street S83½°E N69°E

Potomack River

S80½°E
N6½°E

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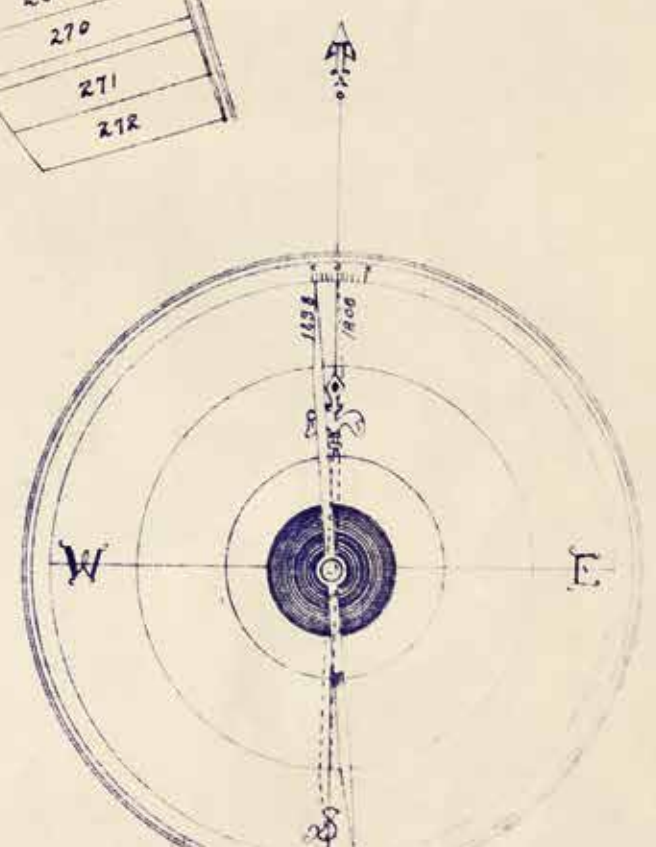for Allegany

1806 MAP OF THE City of Cumberland

Cumberland's downtown Baltimore Street was originally named Bedford Street.

Note the absence of any railroad tracks — the local railroads did not arrive until decades later.

This 1806 map (only a portion shown here) was provided by Dan Whetzel.

Improvement Company owned 170 acres in South End that were laid out and placed on the market for commercial and residential development. Streets throughout his property carried the names of immediate family members and in-laws (the Offutts and Elders). A marriage between Elizabeth Humbird and William Milnor Roberts also provided reasons for street names that exist today.

The main thoroughfare through South Cumberland extended to the Potomac River at Wiley Ford. At the time the avenue was created it made sense to name it Virginia after the direction it was heading. Through no fault of city officials West Virginia seceded from Virginia, and apparently no one since that time believed it necessary to change residents' addresses to West Virginia Avenue.

City streets also adopted the names of Maryland counties when Johnson Heights was laid out more than 100 years ago, while nearby South End streets displayed the names of 11 states.

At least one street name found itself caught up in the anti-German fever of the Great War (1914-1918). German Street in North End nearly exchanged its name for "French Street," according to the ***Cumberland Evening Times*** that reported the city would, "exchange an enemy foreign name for a friendly one. But while we are making changes it is better to get rid of foreign suggestions entirely." Bond Street, a reference to the government bonds that were being offered for sale, was decidedly "more appropriate."

Streets were not the only target of patriotic fever. The Old German Brewery became "Queeno" in 1919, only to return to its former name at a later date.

Another Great War reminder is Pershing Street, a project that coincided with the building of the Post Office (now home to the Allegany Museum). General John J. Pershing emerged as an American hero during the conflict and lived to see his name placed on hundreds of buildings, streets, parks, and plazas throughout the United States. While the First World War is represented, Cumberland has not honored individuals or events from World War II —no Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Bradley, or Normandy streets can be found—perhaps Eleanor and Franklin Streets will suffice.

One oddity was Henderson Boulevard, a name occasionally used by residents. According to J. William Hunt, local newspaper editor, the city attracted criticism because motorists driving Henderson Boulevard encountered 10 stop signs in less than one mile—the boulevard became an avenue.

It is unclear which Henderson's name appears on the avenue, since there were three generations of the family that could be sourced for the honor. As far back as 1868, George Henderson and two business partners appeared in a tax levy document "to make a road extending from west of Fayette Street to the Narrows," while the following two generations became successful lawyers and judges.

The normally obscure topic of street names became an important issue by the 1960s because of duplications and lack of a comprehensive numbering system in the county and city. Cumberland's Postmaster, William B. Orndorf, called upon city and county officials to address the duplication problem and adopt a house numbering plan. Emergency services also supported a comprehensive plan because dispatchers were sometimes unsure of which address needed assistance, and on at least one occasion sent responders to two locations for one incident. Examples included three Pershing Streets between Cumberland and LaVale, and three Maple Streets among Cumberland, Bowling Green, and LaVale. Mary Street appeared in Cumberland and a Mary Court in LaVale. There was a Maryland Avenue in Bowling Green as well as Cumberland, and a Maryland Street in LaVale. Park Street was located in Cumberland and a Park Drive in LaVale. Roberts Street in Cumberland could have been confused with Roberts Avenue, Bowling Green. Potomac Park and Cumberland each had a Ford Avenue. Two Cumberland streets, Fayette and LaFayette, were easily confused, and there are other examples. A lack of central planning and control was cited as being responsible for the confusion.

Cumberland had been troubled by a confusing numbering system at an earlier date. Houses were numbered from "one" to whatever the last number displayed with no attention given to crossing streets and the "block" system of numbers.

It is unclear what became of the call for reform in the 1960s because the duplication of street names remains. GPS navigation systems have probably alleviated many of the concerns for delivery and emergency services.

Cumberland has more than 400 named streets and it may not be practical to consider the origins of all, but it is interesting to know the names frequently reflect local and national events over the years. It is also noteworthy to consider that no major street names have been added since the Urban Renewal programs of the 1960s - 1970s — Queen City Drive and McMullen Bridge being prime examples. Should the need arise, there are worthy candidates awaiting recognition. One is David Lewis, coal miner, local attorney, father of Parcel Post, Maryland State Senator, and member of the United States House of Representatives. Lewis became a recognized expert on Social Security legislation, introduced the Social Security bill into the House of Representatives in 1935, and was an invited guest when President Franklin Roosevelt signed the bill into law. Others will likely offer additional candidates for future consideration should new streets be built or existing ones renamed.

Street names are interesting and add to the historical record of Cumberland. And while the search for origins created opportunities to study a variety of maps over the years, the 1806 historical map remains my favorite one.

J. William "Bill" Hunt and his "Across the Desk" column provided information on many local historical events and places, including street names.