

# Reflect, Rethink, and Reimagine Cumberland

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AS CUMBERLAND, MARYLAND, UNDERGOES MAJOR CONSTRUCTION  
ALLEGANY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS RESEARCH ITS HISTORY



**Artist's rendering of major construction and renovation of Baltimore Street in downtown Cumberland.**

*COURTESY OF COCHRAN STUDIOS, PROJECT DESIGNER*

**Baltimore Street looking west, 1940s.**

*COURTESY DAN WHETZEL COLLECTION*

*Baltimore Street  
Cumberland, Md*



Allegany High School students have been actively engaged in preserving and documenting Cumberland’s history during the 2023-2024 academic year. Their work focused on Baltimore Street, the city’s primary commercial and service corridor for more than 200 years. Timing of the assignment was important because over the past year officials directed one of the most significant undertakings in city history—**“Reimagine Cumberland.”** The major design and construction work meant familiar features and views would be removed and likely forgotten over time. Students enrolled in Historical Research Methods class seized the opportunity to reflect on the changes while researching the commercial and historical importance of the corridor. Results of their research and creative efforts will be displayed in a major exhibit at the Allegany Museum during the summer of 2024.

Brian White, instructor for Historical Research Methods class, recalled the impetus for the project occurred when construction began on the downtown mall in 2023. “We thought it would be the perfect time to document Baltimore Street. We also discussed the Reimagine project and began to narrow the focus of our work. It was decided that noteworthy buildings along Baltimore Street would be researched and documented with written narratives. An important part of the students’ work was to investigate how the shoppers’ experiences

evolved over time from the “old downtown” to suburban shopping centers and indoor malls. Those changes weren’t confined to a particular city like Cumberland, but were experienced nationwide. The history of Baltimore Street and Reimagine Cumberland offered opportunities to explore those changes over time.”

One major trend students identified was the transition from family owned businesses to chain stores, and other “big box” discounters. Autumn Parsons, student, explained that Murphy’s and McCrory’s were typical 5 and 10 cent stores. “Today, dollar stores have taken their place. I also learned how important the downtown stores were to shoppers because they were all located in one area. The local businesses lost popularity when they could not compete with the big box discounters that moved into the area.” Autumn also researched Schwarzenbach’s and Burton’s men’s clothing stores, businesses that appealed to different economic groups. Both stores closed and remain memories for older residents.

Carli Atkinson and Kinsey Hostetler focused on special events and celebrations that were part of the Baltimore

**Left to right: Mya Hare, Sara Schram, and Daniel Ly researching Rosenbaum’s department store.**

*PHOTO BY BRIAN WHITE*





**Top to bottom: Autumn Parsons researching Cumberland's history; Sam Wu choosing old photos; and Abigail Britton scanning photos for production.** PHOTOS BY BRIAN WHITE

Street experience in decades past. According to Carli and Kinsey, “In the past, Baltimore Street was the center of holiday shopping and special events, like the 1955 Fort Cumberland bicentennial parade that was one of the largest in city history. Even though changes have occurred, we believe the city has preserved many of the downtown traditions. In particular, the Christmas tree lighting and New Years Eve celebration attracts residents to downtown.”

Nolan Tabb was responsible for documenting hotels. He found that in the past hotels and passenger rail service were closely related. Not only was the massive Queen City Hotel a lodging option, but also the Brunswick Hotel, a recently demolished landmark located within yards of the B&O Railroad passenger facility. Ownership of the Brunswick property was researched and incorporated into the narrative, as was the nearby Windsor, Algonquin, Olympia, and Fort Cumberland hotels. Only older residents recall the Windsor, while the Fort Cumberland and Algonquin currently serve as senior living facilities. “There have been a lot of changes over the years, mostly caused by how people travel,” concluded Nolan.

Daniel Ly, Sara Schram, and Maya Hare studied Rosenbaum's department store and the major changes that occurred on Baltimore Street during the late 1970s when the first pedestrian mall was designed. The first mall followed in the footsteps of the Cumberland Urban Renewal Agency's (CURA) comprehensive redevelopment of center city. City officials decided to close Baltimore Street to vehicle traffic, thereby creating a pedestrian mall that would compete with the soon to be completed indoor Country Club Mall in LaVale. Implementation of the plan created controversy among store owners and residents—some favored keeping the “old downtown” while others thought the changes would rejuvenate town center. The students found similarities between the discussions of the first mall and today's Reimagine Cumberland project that will reopen Baltimore Street to vehicle traffic. The students' research and written narrative of Baltimore Street redevelopments will be included in the 2024 edition of *Journal of the Alleghenies*, perhaps the first student article to be featured in the publication.

Abigail Britton undertook the task of examining historic photographs that augmented the written narratives submitted by groups. According to Abigail, “Hundreds of photographs were examined and the best ones were selected





# TIMELINE

**1754** Fort Cumberland is built by the British to aid against French hostility in the Ohio Valley during the start of the French and Indian War.

Cumberland originated in 1754 when the British built Fort Cumberland in response to French hostilities in the Ohio River Valley. Strategically located at the fork of the Potomac River and Wills Creek, near what is today the intersection of Washington, Greene and Baltimore streets, the Fort served as a key military outpost during the French and Indian War.

**1765** The British leave the fort — a small settlement remains.

After 1765, British troops abandoned Fort Cumberland; however a small settlement, which had grown up around the garrison, remained to become the center of Cumberland. The city was incorporated in 1787 and was expanded to include the current downtown district in 1798.

**1787** The city is officially incorporated.

In 1790, shortly after the formal establishment of Cumberland, a small wooden bridge, very close to the present day Baltimore Street bridge, was present over Wills Creek.

**1795** The General Assembly of Maryland establishes well defined market regulations for the city's first market.

As town development occurred, the east side of the creek began taking on the chief importance as a business center. By 1830, Mechanic Street was the main thoroughfare; it continued so for many years afterward and in the matter of chief stores and shops, created Baltimore Street until after the Civil War.

**1806** The National Road is authorized and the Baltimore turnpike is built.

The Federal Government authorizes the building of the National Road from the Ohio River to Cumberland; the Baltimore turnpike from Baltimore to Cumberland is constructed.

**1810** Development shapes the city's east side into a business center.

Development shapes the east side of the city into the rivals Baltimore Street, the current Baltimore Street.

**1813** Bedford Street renamed Baltimore Street.

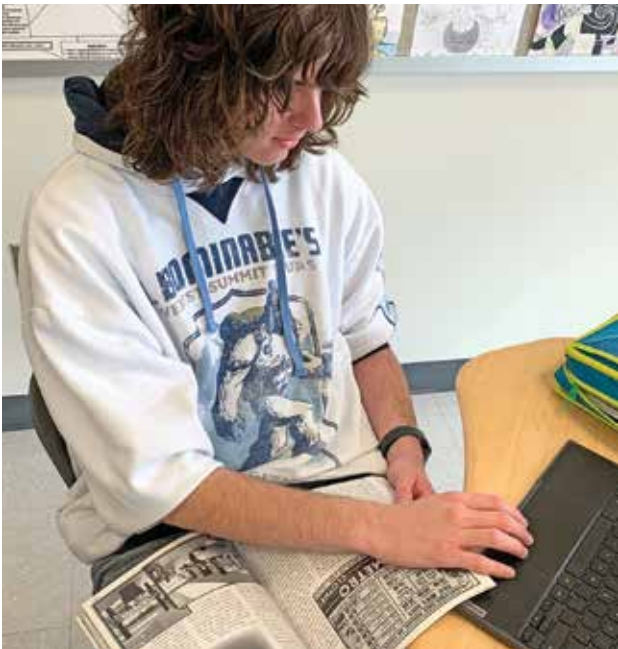
Bedford Street is increasingly referred to as Baltimore Street due to its connection to the recently constructed turnpike.

**1821** Cumberland Road and Baltimore Road completed.



Emmanuel Kujenga (front), graphic designer and Nikola Litten merged photos and text, keeping in mind design challenges with each finished panel being almost seven foot high and four foot wide.

PHOTO BY BRIAN WHITE



Top to bottom: Carli Atkinson and Kinsey Hostetler focused on special events and celebrations from decades past; Nolan Tabb was responsible for documenting hotels; and Carter Rice supplied additional research.

PHOTOS BY BRIAN WHITE

for scanning. We identified stores and dates for each photograph that would be included in the displays.” Residents will no doubt have personal memories of the stores depicted in the panels. Each photograph was then forwarded to Nikola Litten who edited the images to make them suitable for the panels. Editing older photographs often requires a significant amount of time due to the aging process and unintended damage.

When students’ written narratives concluded, the texts were forwarded to Emmanuel Kujenga, graphic designer. Artistic creativity blended with designing skills as Emmanuel merged photos with text. Each panel was designed keeping in mind the finished product would be 83” x 46”. “I collaborated with Mr. White and other students when laying out the panels. All 24 panels will be displayed along the corridor according to the way businesses were located on Baltimore Street, so museum visitors will get the feel of walking along historic Baltimore Street.”

Allegany students benefited from the partnership of Ruth Davis-Rogers, Cumberland Historic Planner/Preservation Coordinator. “Brian and I talked about collaborating on a city project and we both thought that Reimagine Cumberland offered a great opportunity to engage students in documenting history. A quote on the cost of materials was submitted with a grant application to Preservation Maryland. They awarded money for the Allegany project and I am pleased that students have been engaged in telling Cumberland’s history. This program involved students on many different levels.”

Students also benefitted from Ruth’s efforts to make available documents dated from the earliest days through Reimagine Cumberland. The artifacts provided an accurate timeline for narratives and hands on research for students.

Brian White is complimentary of the students’ work. “The project required critical thinking on many different levels. Students performed primary and secondary research that included locating documents and artifacts. They also interviewed residents about their personal experiences with Baltimore Street. It is interesting that our collection of oral histories from past Historical Research classes were consulted to support the current class. We now have a body of historical research that is a great resource for us and the community.”

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***The exhibit is scheduled to open on May 25, 2024, at the Allegany Museum located at 3 Pershing Street, Cumberland, Maryland.***