

The

Collingtonian

Special Summer Edition.

A monthly publication of the Collington Residents Association

Summer 2000

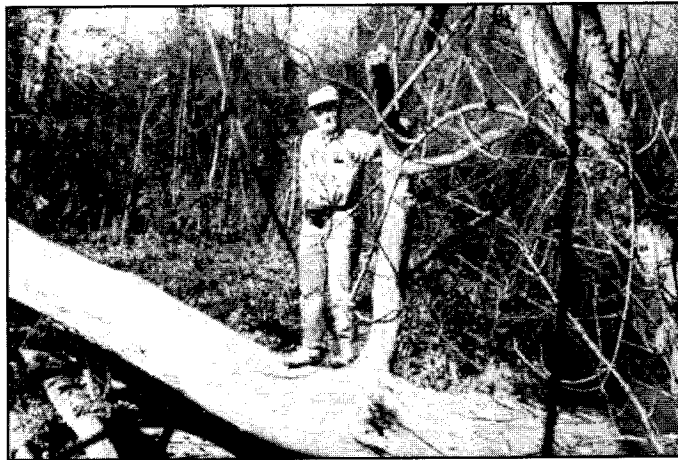
Exploring the Western Branch of the Patuxent River by Faith Jackson and Arthur Longacre

It began with walks on the Collington trails where Art Longacre, long time resident, introduced newcomer Faith Jackson to the surrounding landscape where she had come to spend the rest of her life. A daunting thought, and the walks were welcome. As we went farther afield on different terrain, during the summer and early fall of 1998, we considered the adventurous possibilities of exploring the Western Branch of the Patuxent River, to find out whether it was navigable by canoe.

We soon discovered that walking was difficult, to say the least, and portage impossible because of high banks lined with dense growth and fallen trees. When we reached Upper Marlboro the news was better.

Between November 1999 and March 2000 your intrepid explorers made 13 trips (see map). We would drive and park, find the Branch and walk along as far as possible, then walk back to the car. We walked through thickets--a vine wrapped

itself around Faith's ankle and she tumbled head first into lush poison ivy--through patches of brambles and briars, pot holes, muddy banks and rusty barbed wire snags, involving tetanus shots. Often, the only place to walk was along the steep bank's slippery edge.



Art Longacre on the trail

When we came to an absolute impasse, question: retrace our steps through the bracken or climb the banks? (More about this later). And sometimes, even in the deepest woodlands we would come upon dumps with scattered debris: bottles, tires, old

metal equipment. How did it get there? A lot was thrown in the Branch and washed up on the bank when the water rose and tossed rubber balls and odd junk into the ferns and rocks and dead tree mounds.

Faith made sure that Art led the way, in case of bears. Lagging behind made it possible to step carefully after him, to listen to the quality of silence, different on

(Continued)

each walk; to mark the changes and color of the water, call Art back for good photo ops, and to inspect interesting plants and animal tracks. Deer, raccoon, rabbit, beaver and fox, and we never saw one. Once there was a large black snake coiled up and glistening in its new skin in the one spot of warm sun filtered through the trees.

"Freeze!" Faith called out. "Snake."

"It's not bothering you, is it?"

Way to go.

* * * *

The Western Branch begins 70 yards from Collington trail marker #6, where you can easily see the two following streams come together. Bald Hill Branch begins in Seabrook north of Good Luck Road; it is the stream you see for most of the way from trail marker #5 to #6. Lottsford Branch starts in Glendale and is joined by Folly Branch in the northern part of Enterprise Golf Club. From here on we have the Western Branch. Next, it skirts the eastern side of Lake Arbor Country Club, through Western Branch Stream Valley Park, which begins near marker #6 and is continuous to Central Avenue. The Branch crosses at Kettering near St. Michael's church and then runs along the west side of Watkins Park, all the way to Route 202, Landover Largo Road. The crossing is just west of a power line near Riverdale Baptist church, then curves around the western edge of Oak Grov-Ramblewood development and through the University of Maryland Experimental Farm. There is a goodly stretch through several more parts of Western Branch Stream Valley Park. It is wooded along the entire length to Upper Marlboro, where it flows under Main Street just west of the 202 dead end. It makes a 180 degree loop around the west and

south of the Prince George's Equestrian-Center, crossing Route 4 (Pennsylvania Avenue). From there, the Branch runs through the Patuxent River Park for about 3 miles, navigable by canoe, to the Patuxent River, at Mount Calvert Historic Site, the location of the first county seat of Prince George's County. One Sunday we drove straight down there to see this, our ultimate destination, and renew our courage. Billingsley, Fran Meloy Klein's old home, was seen on the hill across the bight. From first to last, about twenty miles. Counting the distance to and from our car and along the Branch, and false starts, we walked at least as far as the Collington-Mount Calvert distance! Think of it!

* * * *

Walk 1

Followed Bald Hill Branch to its joining with Lottsford, becoming Western Branch, past marker #6 on our trail to within 30 feet of where Lottsford Road bridge crosses it. Late in the day dreary. Turned back from a wide marshy area. Water too cold and deep for November wading.

(The same walk on our trail up to the marker in April was warm, streaked with sunshine, Bald Hill Branch running smartly and wild flowers abundant. Trees greening. The cress is past but Art picked poke for supper).

Walk 2

Parked up at Lottsford Bridge and picked our way to and along Lake Arbor Golf Course. Could hear people. Found two stray golf balls.

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Walk 3

Began walk at St. Michael's church, north towards Lake Arbor Country Club. Here, Western Branch is an insignificant choked up stream. It seemed easier to cross a field to St. Michael's Drive to return to the car. But there was a barbed wire fence which snagged Faith, and the field turned out to be full of cows in the distance and inordinate number of cow pats visible around us.

Walk 4

Drove to Watkins Park, left car and walked north to Kettering, on a real honest to goodness trail. Came out and back within the park on Old Enterprise Road to car. Looong walk.

Walk 5

Parked on Route 202 near Riverdale church and walked north upstream, on the east side of the Branch. When it became clear we were stuck unless we crossed over to the west side, Art chose a solid round--round, I say--log and strolled over. Looked back at Faith. Count blessings that posterity will never see how she made it across in her cold weather gear.

Walk 6

Parked on Route 202 on the west side of the power line and tried to make our way down to the creek. Met the field of poison ivy. Path so obstructed farther on, and riddled with deep, wide, wet gulleys, we could not get near the Branch. Found a treasure, though, a poster: "Re-Elect SENATOR TROTTER

Democrat 24th Legislative District. By authority: Demcrats 2000" Faith still looking for help to put it on her patio wall.



Faith Jackson on the trail

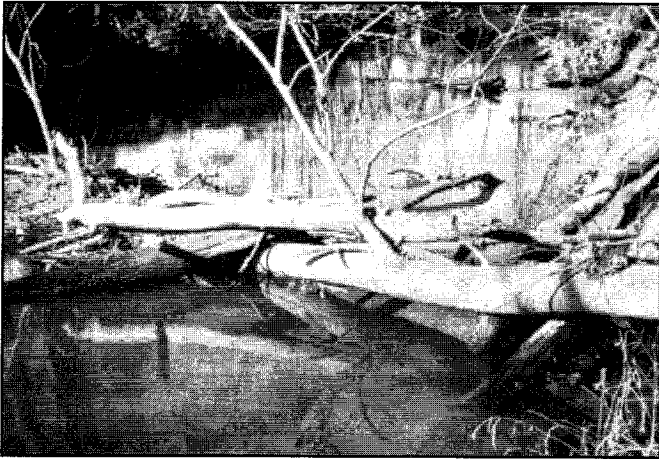
Walk 7

Drove to Oak Grove development on Robert Lewis Avenue and parked on a circular drive near the Branch in another segment of Western Branch Stream Valley Park. Perfect walk through the clearing, perfect weather. Huge beech trees (in oak park!) with wide canopies and thick carpet of leaves under foot made a cathedral. Some sycamores. Heavy vines in wide loops before climbing up the tree trunks. The Branch seemed dammed up where we started our walk, making a wider pool, but the water moved quickly along the sides. Argument: NO, it is NOT a beaver dam!! Faith keeps unusually quiet but doesn't believe him! Found a rubber ball, pitched it in and watched it move gently away. Noticed the banks changed color on our walks from grey to brown to sand. Buzzard over head, dogs barking far away. Do the children from the houses up on the hill ever come down here?

(continued)

Walk 8

Parked again at Oak Grove, walking down stream this time. Came out at Heidi Marie Court, up a steep hill. We had gone a distance; it was a far walk back to the car.



The famous "round" log

Walk 9

Back to Heidi Marie Court. Tried to get to the Branch and walk south. No go, too steep down to the water. Walked along the edge between woods and corn fields looking for a safe place to get down. Gave up, went back to Hancock Road and drove down to a gate at Old Largo Road south of the Maryland Tobacco Farm.

Walked down towards where we knew by map there was the Branch but never got there. Too far. Instead, wandered into an extraordinary bone yard of stone/concrete pieces, big and small blocks, jumbled where they were dropped.

Walk 10

Started at Main Street in Upper Marlboro. Went up stream along the east side

of the Branch for quite a distance. Quit opposite Upper Marlboro Golf Course. Here it was the question: walk back or up. We chose UP. One hundred (100) feet straight up. Wet leaves, slippery as glass, small saplings to grab on to, as we zigged across and back, sometimes straight across, not seeming to make headway. In all, about 1,000 feet to come back out on Route 202, opposite Crescent Drive. Winded. Very, very windy. We were often asked, Do you carry a phone? No. You should. Tell people when you got and where you are going? No. How old are you? Never mind. Art's worry: will I get her home without broken bones? Faith's worry: how will I drag his body home after he falls dead from the weeds he puts in his mouth? But none of it was ever a real concern.

Walk 11

Drove to Brook Lane and Brown Station Road. Went in private road, past an old mattress and trash. We could see a clearing ahead, five cars, and men sitting around. "Militia practice?" Art said. Faith really lagged behind as Art marched up to the leader (?) and asked if we could get to the Branch through his property. "You can't get there, it's all wet, but welcome to try." The group of men were sitting on metal chairs in front of a huge pigeon cote. Raising them? Breeding? Training? Nobody spoke. It was such an unexpected scene, Faith took proper notes.

Walked down to Branch on an old road, then back into thickets. Sun coming through, water actively moving, some huge sycamores, and trash trees. The Branch bank was orange, brown-leaved forest floor, hiding miserable pot holes, green
(continued)

violet patches. Large trees had been cut down to keep from tearing the banks (erosion control).

First time we saw "deer stands", crude ladders going up the tree to a small platform, to sit and wait for deer. Bank turned sandy; visible tracks where animals came to drink. Went another quarter of a mile until stopped by thick underbrush. Turned and walked towards a development we could see on a hill in the distance but the ground between was too marshy. Came back and looked for the trail road. Ground full of dry bed ruts covered with leaves, broken glass and junk everywhere. Saw a drain pipe in opposite bank. Why? Tree trunks fighting for light bent and curved in wierd shapes. Interesting shell-like fungi on logs, like barnacles. Large fungi at base of some trees, red on top, mushroom-like on undersides, size of sycamore leaf. Pigeon fanciers greeted our return with smile. Home by way of Oakland Mansion, Marlboro Pike to White House Road.

Walk 12

Parked on Main Street. Took race Track Road along the Branch which makes a half circle around the west side of the Equestrian Center. Diverged and walked along Branch to Water and Judge Streets at Bridge. Walked towards Main Street to the car. Branch navigable all the way, water running fast. Banks behind Marlboro courthouse held with rip rap all the way along (far off lowlands were flooded). Very sandy banks. Crossed one deep gully, slippery. Faith on rear end.

Walk 13

Parked on Route 301, and walked un- but could go 8 to10 feet higher, muddy banks. Men fishing. Warm day. Saw one

low line of rocks, last barrier to canoeing. Drove to Waste Composting Facility which occupies Old Marlboro Raceway. Saw a large plastic greenhouse, long rows of small balled trees. Nursery, or discards? Big argument.

Faith opts for nursery, private or county. Dogs and man came out as we left. Saw a canoe! Wish we had stopped but man disappeared. Drove on to Billingsley, and crossed the Western Branch for the last time.

Next? Canoeing, anyone?

Note to Readers--

This is a special summer issue of *The Collingtonian*, upsetting the usual schedule. In past years we skipped publication in July and August. The next issue will appear on or about October 1.

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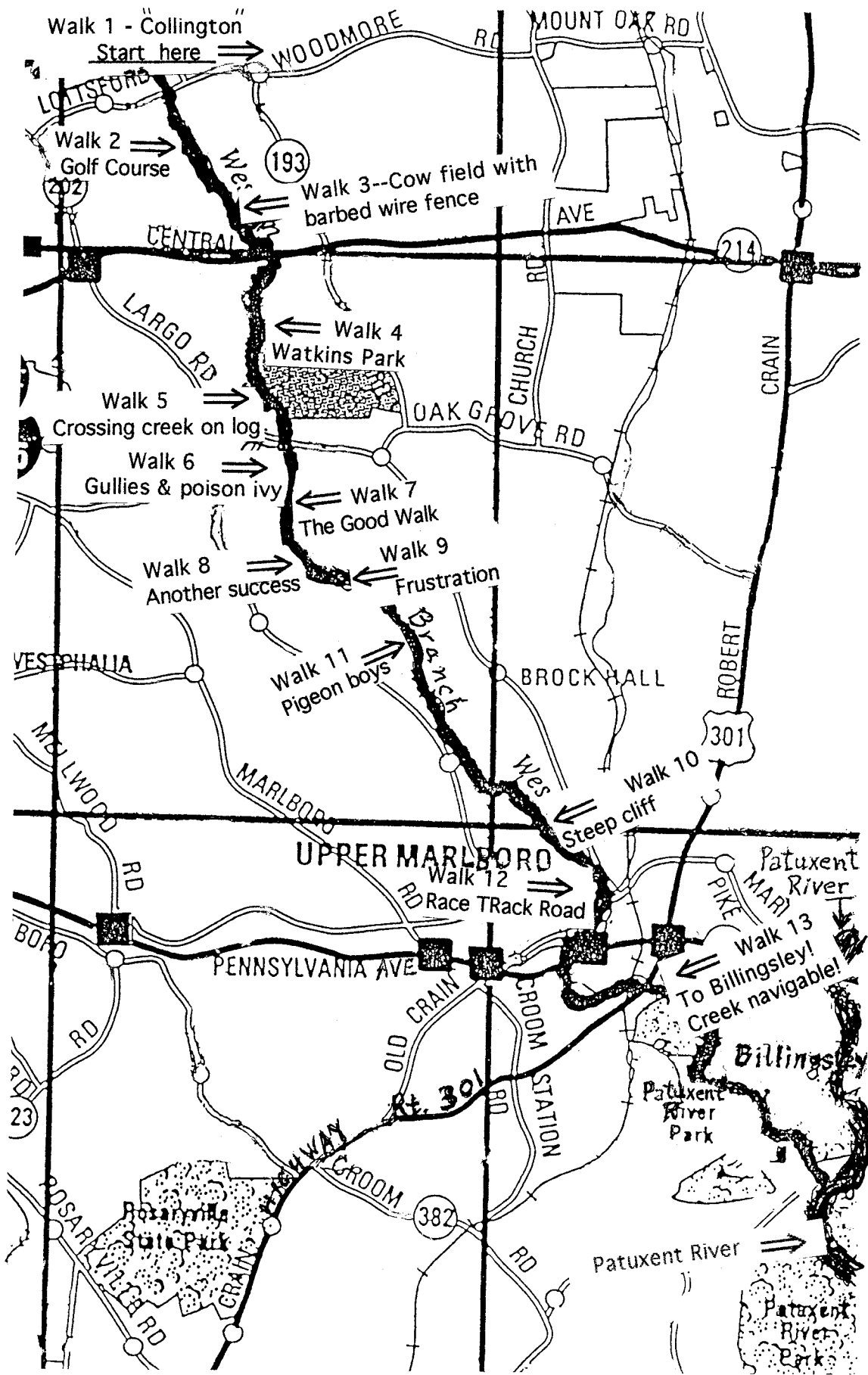
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This map gives a sketchy idea of the area in which Faith and Art walked.

Faithful Summer Visitors

By Edward Behr

Midsummer is here and once again Collington has lots of visitors. Not just the human kind but wildlife too--and notably the barn swallows darting through our skies.

At times they seem almost everywhere. They rove across the fields and the lake, pluck tiny insects off the lake surface and return to the nest to feed their young.

As in years past, the swallows are making themselves at home around our campus. One nest can be seen under the eaves on "Broadway" between the 2200 and 4100 clusters. Another is at the southwest corner of the 2000 cluster, next to the Vickers' cottage.

Yet another is on the porch outside the Creighton Center living room.

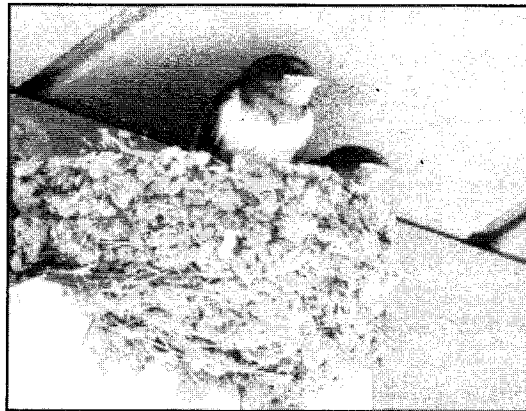
But nesting swallows can fall prey to invaders. Edna Lingreen tells a sad tale of events on her apartment balcony in May. A pair of swallows built a nest there and within a few days a baby bird was peeking up as a parent came with food. Suddenly an invader, apparently a house sparrow, appeared and was chased off by an adult swallow. House sparrows are known as invaders of other birds' nests and Edna soon found two baby swallows dying on the balcony floor. Later she discovered a third victim. Now the swallows have abandoned the nest.

What does a barn swallow look like? One tipoff is the tail--it is deeply forked, unlike the tail of any other swallow we have. The back and wings are blue-black;

the underside is cinnamon-buff.

(Caution: it is possible to confuse the barn swallow with our other resident member of the swallow family. That is the purple martin, which summers in the martin house near the pond. But the martin is bigger, the adult male is blue-black all over and the martin plumage has no brownish color at all.)

Year after year, the barn swallows return faithfully to nesting places from their winter haunts in Central and South America. They are among our earlier spring arrivals, usually showing up in April and nesting in May. In the following months each pair may produce two clutches of young. (One fine spring day a brood of six young ones was seen resting on the lake shore.) The swallows head south again in August.



Hungry nestlings waiting to be fed.

There is good reason, of course, why this bird is called a barn swallow. Traditionally, these swallows nested in barns more than anywhere else. Usually, said the ornithologist Montague Chamberlain in the late 19th century, a typical barn held 20 to 30 swallow nests. And Frank Chapman, a renowned bird expert of the same era, wrote lyrically of the swallows: "almost every old-fashioned barn, with its great doors hospitably opened, is cheered by their sweet call-notes and happy twittering song as they dart in and out on errands of love."

Now, of course, many of the old barns, like the one that stood just north of Collington, are gone and the swallows have settled in other accommodations like the nests they have built here.

Volunteering

If anyone has trouble finding a live swallow to admire close-up, there are always the pictures in the bird guides and other nature books here in our library. And truly memorable is the great John James Audubon's painting of a pair of barn swallows atop a large nest. His version is almost as vivid as what we can see along some of our walkways. Still, there's nothing like the real thing.

Note-Worthy

Where are the ladies? Though women residents of Collington easily outnumber the men, the Public Transportation and Zoning Committee of the Residents Association consists of five male and no female members. Until recently there was a sixth man.

Has anyone seen a monarch butterfly this summer? *The Collingtonian* hasn't heard of any recent sighting of this orange-and-black beauty, usually a summer habitue of our fields and gardens. Last summer a few monarchs were seen here, but they seemed scarcer than in earlier years. Discouraging news stories have reported that toxic pollen from genetically engineered crops is threatening the monarchs.

Rabbits move fast but cars move faster. Recently a young rabbit was flattened in the center of the perimeter road by a car perhaps traveling too fast. Some residents who recall animal depredations in Collington gardens may say that one rabbit is not much of a loss. Others may mourn the death of even a single wild creature.

Volunteering at organizations outside our own campus continues to stand high on the list of our activities.

The most recent survey of residents shows that we put in almost 14,000 hours of volunteer effort for dozens of off-campus organizations.

One resident reports 410 hours in the past year working with the National Symphony and the Prince George's Philharmonic, and other musical organizations.

Another contributes her time generously to social work organizations. Meals on Wheels claims the time of many.

Church work, acting as docent at a museum, lobbying for political organizations and working with prisoners in a literacy program were reported on the recent questionnaire.

Universities and non-profit organization get 2, 231 hours' work out of just 13 very active residents. Hospitals are equally well-served.

And this doesn't consider the time we spend volunteering here on campus for the Residents Association, its committees and other odd activities that come along.

In case you haven't noticed--certain essential items have been moved from the Clocktower desk to a roomier table in the nearby reception area.

They include: Requests for woodshop work; the trip book for season subscriptions to concerts and plays; the trip book for trips to museums and individual music or theater performances; the notebook for recording nature sightings; the book of items proposed for posting on bulletin boards.