Montgomery County 1700 – 1733
The Tobacco Economy
The foundation upon which the development of what would become Montgomery County and those counties surrounding it rested was the culture of tobacco.

The land grant system made possible the numerous land patents for tracts of land that were recorded, surveyed, populated, and cultivated.

Both small farmers and rich planters inhabiting or owning these land patents were tobacco growers. When the tobacco market was good, farmers, planters, and merchants prospered. When the market was depressed, everyone from farmer to official felt it.

The resolution of Queen Anne’s War (1702 – 1712) reopened the British trade of Oronoco variety of tobacco to Europe. This would fuel the establishment of many tobacco plantations in Mont. Co. and usher in a wave of prosperity seeking land tenants, overseers, indentured servants – and slavery.
Early Land Patents in the Rockville Area
(overlaid on present City boundary & roadways)

(TABLE)

Notes:
1698-1749: Prince George's County
1749-1776: Frederick County
1776-present: Montgomery County
Land Patents of fewer than 400 acres are not shown.
Excerpt from a land survey drawing and notes:

- **Explanation:**
  - A shows the original survey based on a specific start point.
  - B shows the progress of the survey from point to point.

- **Survey Notes:**
  - The survey is marked with specific directions and measurements.
  - The beginning and ending points are noted with coordinates.

- **Additional Information:**
  - The survey was conducted by a specific surveyor, as indicated by the signature.

The survey details are meticulously recorded to ensure accuracy in land division and measurement.
Tobacco Cultivation

• The yearly cycle of tobacco cultivation began in the late winter or early spring with the sowing of the seeds in seedbeds. In June the small plants were transplanted into the fields, into rows of tobacco hills. Every day, all summer long, the tobacco was weeded, hoed, and inspected for worms and insects. When flowers began to appear, the plant tops were broken off to encourage fuller and stronger leaf growth. A few weeks after topping - by September - the plants were four to seven feet high and ready to be harvested. The entire plant was cut and hung in barns to dry. Over the winter, the leaves were stripped off the stalks, tied into hands, and packed into huge casks called hogsheads. The tobacco then was ready to be sold or stored.
Tobacco transport to market

Tobacco was packed and then transported or shipped mostly in hogsheads (large wooden barrels). A typical hogshead of tobacco in the 1720s in Maryland averaged 780 pounds of tobacco. Tobacco grown here would be rolled for miles in barrels to private “landings” near present-day Blandensburg.
Tobacco “Money” Economy

Early colonial Montgomery County was all about tobacco. Tobacco growing was so pervasive here and in the rest of the Maryland colony that pounds of tobacco became the universal measure for all other values, payments, wages, taxes, and so on within the province. While the Maryland government never declared tobacco to be the official money of the province, transactions in tobacco commonly included:
Tobacco – good for all debts public and private

- Parish or Church taxes
- County taxes
- Fines and court charges
- Poll tax (a tax on each “taxable” adult in a family)
- Property settlements
- Merchant, store and trade credits
- As barter for needed manufactured goods

Note: a provincial sheriff would visit farms, plantations, and merchants to collect taxes, levies, and fines for the Province.
Marylanders did not carry tobacco leaves around in their pockets as cash nor did they typically make payments directly with tobacco “product” for individual items they purchased in person. Tobacco was a fragile commodity that could easily deteriorate when excessively handled or improperly stored. What were typically traded or used as the medium of exchange were claims on tobacco production or the credits arising from the sale of tobacco in England.
Planters could acquire imported goods by directly trading tobacco for goods from vessels that arrived in the Chesapeake from Britain. They could also barter tobacco for local and/or imported goods from storekeeper-merchants often on credit, i.e. book credit. Typically these storekeeper-merchants were connected to tobacco shipping merchant-houses in Britain. At stores in the Chesapeake, goods would be priced in so many pounds of tobacco of the next harvest. After the next harvest the planter would deliver the tobacco to clear the book credit debt.

Specie (or hard money) in Maryland was very scarce due to this system.
monetary system

2 farthings = 1 halfpenny
2 halfpence = 1 penny (1d)
3 pence = 1 thruppence (3d)
6 pence = 1 sixpence (a 'tanner') (6d)
12 pence = 1 shilling (a bob) (1s)
2 shillings = 1 florin (a 'two bob bit') (2s)
2 shillings and 6 pence = 1 half crown (2s 6d)
5 shillings = 1 Crown (5s)
20 shillings = 1 pound sterling (£)

1.333 Maryland pounds (pcm) = 1 pound sterling
100 pounds tobacco = 10 shillings current (7s6d)
1 pound tobacco = approximately 1.5 halfpennies

One Shilling GBP in 1730 had the purchasing power of about £6.51 GBP or $10.40 USD today
Tobacco prices were relatively high in the late 1710s and early 1720s. This encouraged production expansion. This expansion finally caught up to the market with a vengeance in 1727.

British tobacco imports from the Chesapeake doubled between 1725 and 1727, going from approximately 2.1 million pounds in 1725 to 4.2 million pounds in 1727. Even compared to its previous high of 3.7 million in 1721, the amount imported in 1727 was still a sizable increase.

The consequence was a marked fall in tobacco prices in Maryland. Between 1725 and 1727 tobacco prices fell approximately 25% and continued to fall, being 33% below the 1725 level by 1728.
1728 – 1733 tobacco to paper money transition time

In an attempt to address issues with tobacco supply and tobacco payments when tobacco prices were low a paper money showed up in the Maryland legislature on October 15, 1728. The substance of this bill stated that it followed from “the present state of the staple [tobacco] of the province and the necessity of attempting to improve it... [through] ...the proposed reduction of the quantity of tobacco to be made...” That “if people should be restrained the liberty of making as much tobacco as they can...” they must be given some other medium in which to pay their taxes
Maryland Paper Money Act of 1733

In 1733, after many similar bills and much debate between 1728 and 1732, the Maryland legislature passed an act to issue 90,000 pounds (pcm) in Maryland paper money. The act served to reduce the production of tobacco in Maryland (thus raising its price for the large wealthy planters) and provide a means to pay taxes and other levies with a medium other than tobacco (tobacco demonetization).

Small farmers would get, along with all other masters, 30 shillings of paper money per taxable under their control. In exchange, they had to destroy 300 pounds of tobacco per taxable (150 on or before the last day of July 1734 and 150 on or before the last day of July 1735). Thus, they were given the same rate as the 10 shillings per 100 pounds of tobacco tax assessment equivalent.

If the tobacco was not destroyed then a fine of 20 shillings was assessed. These farmers could use the paper money given to them to pay most all taxes, fees, etc.

Assuming that many of these small marginal farmers were only growing enough tobacco to pay the taxes which had to be paid in tobacco, these small growers could give up doing what they were relatively inefficient at and switch into more profitable crops instead.
Initial issue note of 1733

Two Shillings & Six Pence

This indented Bill of Two Shillings & Six Pence shall pass current for the Sum hereon mentioned in all Payments according to the Provisions of an Act of Assembly of Maryland Saited at Annapolis the ___ Day of ___ Anno Dom. 17

2 Shillings 6 Pence
Explaination
A shows the original Bays numbered from 1 to 42
B shows the Bays of the Southern Numbered from 43 to 90
the line marked with yellow shows the West of Bradford East

Compl'd as follows:
From the 1st line 2/3 by Millers Dielbye to the 1/3 by the
Boundary on Bradford Bank to the 1/3 by South Crooks
Lanes to the 1/3 by furnished Bank to the 1/3 by Home
Crooks to the given one by John Niles and the
given one by Hewlett.

Signed by a sale of 120 square City at an Inter

Wm. Crow.
from the Maryland Calendar of Wills 1720 – 1726...

Bradford, John, planter, Prince George's County, 26th March, 1726; 11th May, 1726. Testator states that certain debts are due, chiefly to Mr. John Hyde and sons, mcht., in London, and to the orphans of Mr. James Butler, of Md., dec'd, and empowers exs. to sell following tracts for benefit of estate:

Montgomery Co. Tobacco Plantation finds...details to follow