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"Here all seems security and peace!": How Brookeville, Maryland Became United States Capital for a Day

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"Here all seems security and peace!": How Brookeville, Maryland Became United States Capital for a Day

Abstract

When the British burned Washington D.C. during the War of 1812, the city's civilians and officials fled to the surrounding countryside to escape the carnage. Fearful that the attack on the Capital could eventually spell defeat and worried for their city, these refugees took shelter in the homes and fields of Brookeville, Maryland, a small, Quaker mill town on the outskirts of Washington. These pacifist residents of Brookeville hosted what could have been thousands of Washingtonians in the days following the attack, ensuring the safety of not only the people of Washington, but of President Madison himself. As hosts to the President, the home of a prominent couple stood in for the President's House, and as the effective center of command for the government, the town was crowned Capital of the United States for a day. This paper hopes to expound upon the history of this event, focusing on the Quaker community that rose so charitably to the challenge. Through an examination of primary sources, digitized archival materials, and previous research, this is a history of Brookeville as it was in August 1814, a tribute to its people and an acknowledgement of its importance.

Keywords

Maryland, War of 1812, Brookeville, Quaker History, Capital of the United States, James Madison

Disciplines

History | Religion | United States History

Comments

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“Here all seems security and peace!”¹

How Brookeville, Maryland Became United States Capital for a Day

Abstract: When the British burned Washington D.C. during the War of 1812, the city’s civilians and officials fled to the surrounding countryside to escape the carnage. Fearful that the attack on the Capital could eventually spell defeat and worried for their city, these refugees took shelter in the homes and fields of Brookeville, Maryland, a small, Quaker mill town on the outskirts of Washington. These pacifist residents of Brookeville hosted what could have been thousands of Washingtonians in the days following the attack, ensuring the safety of not only the people of Washington, but of President Madison himself. As hosts to the President, the home of a prominent couple stood in for the President’s House, and as the effective center of command for the government, the town was crowned Capital of the United States for a day. This paper hopes to expound upon the history of this event, focusing on the Quaker community that rose so charitably to the challenge. Through an examination of primary sources, digitized archival materials, and previous research, this is a history of Brookeville as it was in August 1814, a tribute to its people and an acknowledgement of its importance.

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HIST 343: The Early Republic
Professor Michael Birkner
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¹ Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society: Portrayed by the Family Letters of Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith (Margaret Bayard) From the Collection of Her Grandson J. Henley Smith*, ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906; HathiTrust), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001263225>, 100.

On the morning of August 26, 1814, Henrietta Thomas Bentley of Brookeville, Maryland could not have anticipated how the day's events would transform her lovely but simple home on the corner of Market Street into the acting White House. She was well aware of the war with the British raging just twenty miles away in Washington, what with the near-constant stream of citizen refugees and American soldiers that poured past the doors of her home, stopping for refreshment before continuing on to Baltimore or lodging, as Washington socialite Margaret Bayard Smith did, for a few days to wait out the chaos in Washington. In a letter dated August 25, Mrs. Smith remarked on the graciousness of her Quaker hostess as she tended to all these visitors: "I never saw more benevolent people. 'It is against our principles,' said she [Mrs. Bentley] this morning, 'to have anything to do with war, but we receive and relieve all who come to us.'"² It was indeed true that the majority of the population of Brookeville wanted nothing to do with the war, despite their proximity to the conflict. Settled by Quakers who established the Sandy Spring Meeting on the property of James Brooke sometime around 1753, the area was and continues to be distinctly Quaker.³ Quakers were forbidden to support or partake in war, but in these last days of August, the Quaker call to kindness and mercy sounded louder than their pacifist convictions.⁴

Despite their opposition to the war, the Quakers of tiny Brookville, Maryland played host to Washington's civilians, soldiers, generals, statesmen, and President when the British burned the city. As the ruined shell of the torched White House still smoldered, President James Madison set up his center of command in Mrs. Bentley's modestly appointed home. The Bentleys were not the only family that welcomed refugees from Washington. Many others

² Ibid., 104.

³ Megan O'Hearn, "'Fewer inducements to vice': Brookeville's Quaker Identity," *Brookeville 1814*, 2014, <https://msa.maryland.gov/brookeville/identity.html>.

⁴ O'Hearn, "'Fewer inducements to vice'."

opened their homes, kitchens, and fields so that the refugees of the sacked city could eat, sleep, and recover from the trauma of fleeing their homes. In this dark chapter of Washington's history, it was the citizens of Brookeville that supported the city's residents and ensured their safety. Though they only stayed in the spotlight for a few days, the town and citizens of Brookeville demonstrated admirable valor in hosting their Washington neighbors, a kindness that ultimately assisted the recovery and reconstruction of the Nation's capital. This essay hopes to illuminate this town and its inhabitants—unlikely heroes of the Burning of Washington—and the crisis that put Brookeville on the map, if only for a day.

By August of 1814, the war of 1812 had dragged on for two long years. In many ways, the war had been a disaster. America was a young nation, overconfident and once again facing a well-oiled army—the chances of victory were slim. Early invasions of Canada fell short of expectations as Canadian forces sided with the British to soundly defeat Americans instead of taking the chance to rebel against the British as Americans had hoped.⁵ Despite winning a few decisive naval battles, American strength was waning. The war came to Maryland in 1813, as the British troops in the Chesapeake frightened the coast, destroying and looting towns and generally causing panic with the aim of demoralizing the country and bringing about an American surrender.⁶ The fight was creeping closer and closer to Washington, and after the British victory at Bladensburg, it was only a matter of hours before Washington fell. In the days leading up to the invasion of Washington, many of the Capital's residents had fled. Margaret Bayard Smith recounted this flight from Washington, relating that upon hearing news of British forces debarking at Benedict, Maryland on Sunday August 21, “the alarm was such that on Monday a

⁵ “The War of 1812 in Maryland,” *Brookeville 1814*, 2014, <https://msa.maryland.gov/brookeville/events.html>.

⁶ *Ibid.*

general removal from the city and George Town took place. Very few women or children remain'd in the city on Tuesday evening [...] Few doubted our conquering.”⁷

First Lady Dolley Madison fled on Wednesday after famously securing Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington and made her way to Bellevue, the home of Charles Carroll.⁸ She had planned to meet her husband there, but soon received word that his plans had changed. She traveled into Virginia, hoping to meet him at the Georgetown Ferry. This plan fell through and she instead made her way to Rokeby, Virginia, where she spent the night of August 24. After Rokeby, she spent a night at Wiley's Tavern where she briefly crossed paths with the President. After two more nights in Virginia, she made her way back to the smoldering capital on August 28.⁹ President Madison was on the battlefield of Bladensburg, Maryland when he heard news of General William Winder's retreat the afternoon of the 24th. After a brief stop at the White House to collect several supplies, he fled the city, spending a night in Salona, present-day McLean, Virginia. After some travel through the north of Virginia the following day, a rendezvous with the First Lady, and weathering a storm that made the Potomac impassable, he was ferried over to Maryland the afternoon of the 26th. Stopping a short time at Montgomery Court House in Rockville, Maryland, he continued to Brookville, where he spent the night.¹⁰

Despite its small size, the town that James Madison arrived in the night of August 26 was a thriving commercial center for the rural community that surrounded it. Established in 1794 by Deborah and Richard Thomas Jr. on part of the 248 acres Deborah had inherited from her grandfather James Brooke, the Brookeville of 1814 boasted several mills, a few carpenters,

⁷ Smith, *Washington Society*, 98.

⁸ Anthony S. Pitch, *The Burning of Washington: the British Invasion of 1814* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 88.

⁹ “Flight of the Madisons,” *The White House Historical Association*, accessed April 19, 2020, www.whitehousehistory.org/flight-of-the-madisons.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

tailors, a hatter, blacksmith, tannery, physician, shoemaker, two general stores, a Post Office, and about fifteen houses.¹¹ Most of the town's residents in 1814 were in some way descended from the Thomases—President Madison's hostess Henrietta Thomas Bentley was in fact their niece¹²—and the majority had retained their Quaker faith along with its adversity to war and violence. Why Brookeville was chosen as a place of refuge for the President and Washingtonians is not perfectly clear. The common misconception is that Dolley Madison facilitated this stay because of her Quaker background. Though Dolley Madison had indeed been raised Quaker, she was no longer a practicing Quaker in 1814 and there is no evidence that it was her Quaker connections that brought the President to Brookeville. She did have a friend, Deborah Plesants Stabler, who resided in Brookeville, but as President Madison did not stay with the Stablers, there is no indication that he chose Brookeville based on the connection to Dolley. Another common misconception is that Mrs. Madison took refuge in Brookeville alongside her husband. This too, is inaccurate. She was in Virginia at the time when Brookeville became the Nation's capital.¹³

If not for Dolley's interference, then why Brookeville? The well-known Quaker opposition to the War of 1812 and violence in general could have made Brookeville an unlikely choice for refugees of that war, but Brookeville was the first major town along the federal post road that stretched from Washington D.C. to Taneytown, Maryland.¹⁴ Brookeville's position along this well-maintained federal road as well as its proximity to a crossroads which connected

¹¹ "Historical Overview," *Town of Brookeville, MD*, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://townofbrookevillemd.org/about-our-town/history/>; O'Hern, "Professions and Businesses: Brookeville's Working Class," *Brookeville 1814*, 2014, <https://msa.maryland.gov/brookeville/businesses.html>.

¹² Kyle Bacon, "Henrietta Thomas Bentley (1782-1860)," *Brookeville 1814*, 2012, <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/015900/015907/html/15907bio.html>.

¹³ "5 Myths About Brookeville and the War of 1812," uploaded to *Town of Brookeville, Maryland*, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://townofbrookevillemd.org/about-our-town/history/>.

¹⁴ Megan O'Hearn, "Professions and Business: Brookeville's Working Class," *Brookeville 1814*, 2014, <https://msa.maryland.gov/brookeville/businesses.html>.

Rockville and the western areas of the state to Baltimore made it not only an easily accessible candidate for sheltering the President and civilians during the British invasion but also contributed to the town's early commercial success.¹⁵ Towns like Brookeville cropping up in rural parts of the country were markers of the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century transition to light industry and the rise of small manufacturing towns. Farmers of the surrounding area would come to centers like Brookeville to grind, store, and sell their grain. As convening places for the surrounding agricultural community, Brookeville and other similar settlements morphed into hubs for community activity that other commercial ventures could build upon, developing the area further.¹⁶ Additionally, Brookeville benefitted from its proximity to the Capital, although Washington was in those days not yet the bustling capital its founders had hoped it would be.¹⁷

Though relatively close to the Capital, Brookeville could not have seemed farther away. Its bucolic charm calmed the refugees from Washington with its picturesque greenery and gave them a sense of separation from the war and its troubles. Writing from Brookeville on August 24, the same day the White House would burn, Margaret Bayard Smith remarked on these effects:

The appearance of this village is romantic and beautiful, it is situated in a little valley totally embosom'd in woody hills, with a stream flowing at the bottom on which are mills. In this secluded spot, one might hope the noise, or rumor of war would never reach. Here all seems security and peace!¹⁸

¹⁵ O'Hern, "'Security and peace': Refugees in Brookeville," *Brookeville 1814*, 2014.

¹⁶ Catherine C. Lavoie, "Thomas-Bentley House (Madison House), 205 Market Street, Brookeville, MD," Historic American Buildings Survey Report (HABS No. MD-1375) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2011), <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/item/md1935/>, 19-20.

¹⁷ Pitch, *The Burning of Washington*, 24.

¹⁸ Smith, *Washington Society*, 100.

Smith's characterization was apt: the town was well situated in a pretty wooded area, with the Reedy Branch of the Hawlings River curving around the northern border of the town and a well-kept main street that sloped upward on a hill. The Bentley's property was a large lot, located on the northern end of town near Richard Thomas Jr.'s grist mill.¹⁹ The house, likely built between 1798 and 1800 by the Thomas family of Quaker Master Builders, is an example of the day's Federal style. Though refined, the Bentley home is different from the typical architectural expressions of this style as it lacks the "formality and scale of other middle to upper-class homes in the region."²⁰ This difference is due to the Quaker emphasis on simplicity. Anything more ornate would have been considered boastful, not in keeping with the customs of the Society of Friends. As prominent members of the Sandy Spring Meeting, Brookeville's local Friends Meeting, Caleb and Henrietta Bentley had to be conscious of their image. Caleb Bentley was appointed more than once as a representative to the Baltimore Quarterly Meeting, a periodic gathering of Maryland friends. This is no surprise considering Caleb Bentley's standing in the community. Bentley was a wealthy landowner, merchant, and land speculator, first postmaster of Brookeville, and a respected silversmith, hired to lay one of the four cornerstones of the Capitol Building in 1793.²¹ With his hand in many ventures of the small town, the Bentleys were certainly a prominent family in the growing community. Mrs. Bentley fulfilled the same roles as representative for the Sandy Spring Women's Meeting and attended the Baltimore Quarterly Meeting herself several times.²² Her appointment was not uncommon—women took a much larger role in the administration of the Society of Friends than of almost any other religious sect of the time. The unusual influence of women in Quakerism was the product of the early

¹⁹ "Interactive Map of Brookeville in 1814," *Brookeville 1814*. 2014.

²⁰ Lavoie, "Thomas-Bentley House," 1-3.

²¹ Kyle Bacon, "Biography of Caleb Bentley (1762-1851)," *Brookeville 1814*. 2012

²² *Ibid.*

involvement of women like Margaret Fell in the founding of the Society of Friends as well as the Quaker emphasis on spiritual equality that entitled Quaker females to an education and facilitated their roles as itinerant preachers, spiritual leaders, and forerunners of reform movements. Knowing this, the assumption that Henrietta Bentley and her husband were equally well-respected in Brookeville is a sound one. No doubt her Quaker upbringing had prepared Henrietta Bentley for the leadership role she took as refugees flooded the streets of Brookeville. Mrs. Bentley had represented her community before and was well equipped to do so again in her Nation's time of need.

On the morning of Thursday August 25, Mrs. Bentley was already hard at work for her nation. Enjoying the Bentley's hospitality, Margaret Bayard Smith applauded the industriousness of her hostess. "Every hour the poor, wearied, and terrified creatures are passing by the door. Mrs. Bently[sic] kindly invites them in to rest and refresh. Major Ridgely's troop of horse all breakfasted in town, that not a man was left to breakfast in the tavern."²³ Even with the help of Mrs. Smith and her daughters, one can only imagine the effort it must have taken Mrs. Bentley and the other women of Brookeville to feed this enormous number of hungry soldiers. The undertaking is not only impressive because of the sheer amount of food that must have been cooked, but because of the chaos they must have brought to Mrs. Bentley's, briefly disrupting her home and way of life. Even if the soldiers were suitably respectful—there is no reason to assume they were not—the thought of hosting dozens of dirty, smelly, frightened young soldiers would have sent many other homemakers wringing their hands. To add another challenge, Mrs. Bentley was around six-and-a-half-months pregnant with her daughter, Sarah Brooke Bentley

²³ Smith, *Washington Society*, 101.

who would be born in November of that year.²⁴ It does not take much imagination to realize that the effort she put forth in welcoming these refugees into her home must have been taxing.

Henrietta Bentley is to be applauded for her level-headedness and impressive industriousness.

By 10 pm on Thursday night, Mrs. Bentley's house was still crowded, and she sat the whole evening providing refreshments to soldiers and civilians fleeing the Capital.²⁵ Mrs. Smith remarked that "the table is just spread for the 4th or 5th time, more wanderers just enter'd."²⁶ The Bentleys continued welcoming guests even though a hurricane-like storm that hit around dinner time "blew down houses, tore up trees, and spread terror around."²⁷ Around that time, the same storm was preventing President Madison's crossing of the Potomac, delaying his journey to Brookeville. In the midst of all the commotion in her home, Mrs. Bentley surely did not think that the next day would bring not only the arrival of more refugees, but a fleeing President and his company seeking refuge.

The Bentley house was not the first place President Madison attempted to find lodging when he arrived in Brookeville the night of Friday, August 26. Local lore holds that Richard Thomas Jr., the founder of the town and Mrs. Bentley's uncle, refused the President shelter because as a Federalist, he "had no use for anyone who would carry on a war so distasteful."²⁸ Though popular—it was printed as truth in the *American Historical Register* in 1895—this is untrue; as a correspondent for the *Federal Republican* reported on August 31, 1814, when the President's party arrived at the door, their guide asked only "if General Mason and suite, could

²⁴ "Memorial for Sarah Brooke Bentley Warfield (1814-1837)," *FindAGrave*, 2004, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/9069560/sarah-brooke-warfield>.

²⁵ Smith, *Washington Society*, 104.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁸ J.D. Warfield, "President Madison's Retreat," in *The American Historical Register and Monthly Gazette of the Patriotic-Hereditary Societies of the United States of America*. March—August 1895, vol. 2, ed. Charles Henry Browning (Philadelphia: Historical Register Publishing Company, 1895), 859.

have lodgings for the night,” not mentioning that the president was among the General’s party. Thomas was not aware that the President could have stayed in his home. The guide was refused, not because of Thomas’ aversion to General Mason or any of the troops but because he simply had no room left as his home was filled with “families who ha[d] fled from Washington and Georgetown.”²⁹ Historians estimate that around 8,000 people lived in Washington in 1814, with another 5,000 in Georgetown. With an estimated 90% fleeing the city, it is likely many homes in Brookeville were filled like Mr. Thomas’ to the limit.³⁰ Not able to lodge at Mr. Thomas’, the party ventured across the street to Mrs. Bentley’s house.³¹ The Bentleys were equally ignorant when they welcomed General Mason’s party that they were receiving the President as well. It was only when General Mason announced President Madison’s entrance that the Bentleys realized the honor bestowed upon them.³²

Upon the realization of this news, the Bentley household and the town sprung into a flurry of activity. Mrs. Smith had left that morning to visit her friend, Anna Marie Mason, wife of the same General Mason who asked for lodging at the Bentleys’. Mrs. Mason was unwell and lodging some four miles outside of Brookeville with a “poor but respectable family.”³³ Checking on her friend, the faithful chronicler was absent during the arrival of President Madison. Fortunately, her daughters were present, and they were able to tell their mother the details of the “novel and interesting” scene.³⁴

²⁹ “5 Myths About Brookeville.”

³⁰ Sandra Heiler, “U.S. Capital for a Day,” uploaded to *Town of Brookeville, Maryland*, accessed April 27, 2020, <https://townofbrookevillemd.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/1814-revised-07-12-14.pdf>, 2.

³¹ “5 Myths About Brookeville.”

³² *Madison House Tour in Brookeville*, filmed by Sonya Burke. Montgomery Community Media, 2014, MyMCMedia, 1 minute.

³³ Pitch, *The Burning of Washington*, 161; Smith, *Washington Society*, 105.

³⁴ Smith, 107.

Just at bed time the [President] had arrived and all hands went to work to prepare supper and lodgings for him, his companions and guards, — beds were spread in the parlour, the house was filled and guards placed round the house during the night. A large troop of horse likewise arrived and encamp'd for the night, beside the mill-wall in a beautiful little plain, so embosom'd in woods and hills. The tents were scatter'd along the riverlet and the fires they kindled on the ground and the lights within the tents had a beautiful appearance. All the villagers, gentlemen and ladies, young and old, throng'd to see the President. He was tranquil as usual, and tho' much distressed by the dreadful event, which had taken place not dispirited.³⁵

The Bentleys' granddaughter, Mary Thomas Bentley, admired the President's calmness and selfless approach to the situation. She remembered from what we can assume are stories passed down from her grandmother that President Madison only asked for a room for his officers. Mrs. Bentley's private room was set aside for them. This sacrifice is all the more impressive when we consider Mrs. Bentley's pregnancy, and the physical discomfort she must have endured to sleep crammed into bed with another member of her family. Madison was surely glad for the shelter, as he had slept in the woods for two nights prior to his arrival in Brookeville.³⁶ However, Madison did not sleep but sat up all night in an armchair with a secretary table, writing letters and taking care of business. Naturally, the Bentleys treasured this armchair for years.³⁷ President Madison had to take advantage of his lodgings at Brookeville, as it was the first chance he had been given to resume running the government from a fixed location. The room in which he sat

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Forgotten Brookeville*. Directed by Pat Anastasi. Cohort 14 Productions, 2012. Vimeo, 8 minutes.

³⁷ Warfield, "President Madison's Retreat," 860.

became the acting Oval Office, the Bentley's home became the stand-in President's House, and for the night of August 26, 1814, Brookeville was the command center and capital of the United States of America.

A little after his arrival at ten p.m., President Madison sat in his makeshift office to write to then Secretary of State James Monroe, inquiring as to whether or not Monroe would join him in Brookeville, adding that, "If you decide on coming hither, the sooner the better."³⁸ Writing a day earlier from the same house, Margaret Bayard Smith worried that her letters would not reach her sister for some time. She and President Madison need not have worried much—they were in no better place for mail.³⁹ Caleb Bentley fulfilled his duties as Brookeville's postmaster from his home; the east wing of the house originally had no connection to the rest of the residence and was used as the town's post office and a small general store.⁴⁰ This post office was one of the most secure locations in Brookeville, for as a government building designated for sensitive material, iron bars over the windows protected the interior. The settings of these bars are still visible around the windows of the house today. Caleb Bentley's post office was where Margaret Bayard Smith's husband Samuel, President of the Bank of Washington among other jobs, brought specie for safekeeping. The Bank of Colombia also used the Brookeville post office as a storehouse.⁴¹ The government took advantage of this secure space as well. Senate clerks Lewis Machen and John McDonald took matters into their own hands when the situation in Washington became dire, spiriting a cartload of essential documents to Brookeville. These materials were

³⁸ "From James Madison to James Monroe, 26 August 1814," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/03-08-02-0138>. [Original source: *The Papers of James Madison*, Presidential Series, vol. 8, *July 1814–18 February 1815 and supplement December 1779–18 April 1814*, ed. Angela Kreider, J. C. A. Stagg, Mary Parke Johnson, Anne Mandeville Colony, and Katherine E. Harbury. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015, pp. 141–142.]

³⁹ Smith, *Washington Society*, 104.

⁴⁰ Lavioe, "The Thomas-Bentley House," 15; Bacon, "Biography of Caleb Bentley."

⁴¹ Heiler, "U.S. Capital for a Day," 1-2.

sensitive, containing information on the position and numbers of American Forces currently assembling to face the British.⁴² In a house tour filmed for Montgomery Community Media in 2014, the current owner of the Bentley house, Sandra Heiler speculates that the documents and/or specie could have been hidden behind a trap door that led to the cellar of the post office.⁴³ Though the Bentley home and Brookeville post office were the best options available to President Madison in this time of crisis, he was eager to return to his true capital. After receiving the President's letter, Secretary Monroe would join him the next day around ten a.m. and upon his arrival the President's party almost immediately left Brookeville.⁴⁴ Just as suddenly as they came, Secretary Monroe, President Madison and their party were gone, riding back that evening to the "suffering city" that awaited them.⁴⁵ Over the following days, Mrs. Smith and the rest of the civilian refugees trickled out, gathering up the belongings they had hastily packed and returning with trepidation to their city. On the night before she departed, Mrs. Smith took in the natural beauty of her safe haven one last time.

It is now night, all around is quiet. All the inhabitants of this peaceful - village sleep in peace. How silent! How serene! the moonlight gilds the romantic landscape that spreads around me. Oh my God, what a contrast is this repose of nature, to the turbulence of society [...] At this moment, escaped from danger, I, and my family, all I hold most dear, are safe. But when I think of my good fellow citizens, when I think of our poor soldiers [...] I can hardly enjoy my own security.⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *Madison House Tour in Brookeville*.

⁴⁴ Heiler, "U.S. Capital for a Day," 9.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Washington Society*, 108.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

As Mrs. Smith left Brookeville on Sunday the 28th, she knew she would be facing a difficult scene in Washington. Her city had been sacked, the public buildings burned, and the people disheartened. Though her own home was not in a terrible state, she lamented the “crack’d and blacken’d” remains of the once stately Capitol, and particularly mourned for the President’s House, “only ashes, now trodden underfoot by the rabble.”⁴⁷ Though the ruins of the buildings upset her, it was the spirits of her country that Mrs. Smith feared for most. She bemoaned the transitory nature of human grandeur, and how quickly great hopes could be destroyed.⁴⁸ Though her tone seems a bit melodramatic to the modern reader, it is important to remember that the armed forces had not yet driven the British out, and the reconquering of America—and with it the undoing of the ideals of the Revolution—seemed a very real possibility. Mrs. Smith and her friends had reason to be dismayed. They had built a republic from the ground up; in that moment, it seemed to be crumbling before them. Though she would live to see the expulsion of the British and recovery of the Capital, she did not greet the scene with much hope. Over the coming months, the government and the citizens of Washington would have to demonstrate a great resoluteness as they came together to mend their broken city.

Back in Brookeville, Henrietta Bentley was restoring her home to its normal state. With the troops, civilians, and President gone, she could at last rest, knowing she had served her fellow Americans in a time of need. She also had time to assess the wear and tear to her property, a result of the high volume of guests and of the hurricane-force winds that had kept James Madison from crossing the Potomac the night of the 25th. Aside from probably some scratched furniture and dented doorframes here and there, no major damages were recorded. In the garden however, her vegetables and flowerbeds had been trampled by soldiers stationed outside the

⁴⁷ Ibid., 9-10.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 10.

house to guard the President.⁴⁹ Their constant marching likely buried the clay pipe bowl found nearly two hundred years later by current owner Sandra Heiler. Unearthed while Heiler was planting tulip bulbs, the pipe bowl is marked with the Great Seal of the United States.⁵⁰ Perhaps a cabinet member or even the President had dropped it while taking a moment in the garden to smoke. This remarkable discovery and an interest in the story of Brookeville and the Bentley's historic house prompted Heiler to seek funding from the state of Maryland and the Daughters of the American Revolution so she could find out more. Culminating in a bicentennial celebration in 2014, the Brookeville 1814 project examined archival, secondary, and archaeological evidence to uncover the aspect of the town during its moment in the spotlight.

The story of Brookeville is not only intriguing because of its brief moment in the history of the Capital—it is also a microcosm illustrating the change that took place in the early 19th century as rural agricultural settlements made the switch towards small-scale, local industrialization and manufacturing.⁵¹ Though flourishing in the time of President Madison's stay, changing transportation patterns ultimately led to the decline of Brookeville as an industrial center.⁵² Today, the town is small and primarily residential, retaining vestiges of 1814. Were Caleb and Henrietta Bentley to walk Market Street today, they would still feel more or less at home in their town. And thanks to the diligent research and restoration done by Sandra and Duane Heiler, they may feel at home in their house as well. Though they have gone largely unrecognized, the Quakers of Brookeville were there when the city of Washington needed them most. In offering their tranquil town and their tireless support, these pacifists ensured the safety

⁴⁹ J.D. Warfield. "President Madison's Retreat," 860.

⁵⁰ *Forgotten Brookeville*; Deborah K. Deitsch, "Historic Home Contest Winner and Runners-Up," *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 19 Oct. 2012, www.washingtonpost.com/realestate/2012/10/18/59e55224-148e-11e2-bf18-a8a596df4bee_story.html?_hpid=hp-local-neighborhoods%3Ahomepage_pandora_t&hpid=hp-local-neighborhoods%3Ahomepage_pandora_t.

⁵¹ Lavoie, "Thomas-Bentley House," 1.

⁵² Club Members. *The Wednesday Club of Sandy Spring Addendum*, ed. Linda Balderson, Lulu Publishing Services, 2016.

of Washington's most essential documents and people and are responsible in part for the eventual recovery of the city.

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Appendix A: The Bentley House and Historical Plaque, Brookeville, MD.
Photos by author, April 2020.



Bentley House



Historical Plaque

Appendix B: View from the top of Market Street, Brookeville, MD.
Photo by author, April 2020.



Market Street. The driveway of the Bentley Property is visible at the very base of the hill on the left.

Appendix C: Sandy Spring Meeting House and Burial Ground and the Bentley Family Plot,
burial site of Caleb Bentley (unmarked grave), Sandy Spring, MD.
Photos by author, April 2020.



Bentley Family Plot



Sandy Spring Meeting House and Burial Ground