# Hidden Histories of Baltimore County

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**(https://voiceshakes.files.wordpress.com/2010/12/dsc00651.jpg)**

**Strikes, Evictions, and Loch Raven's "Lost City"**

*This is one among several essays I have been writing about some of the people's history of Baltimore County, where I grew up.*

Growing up in Baltimore County, you learn to find the interesting things that lie between the strip malls, suburban housing developments, and golf courses. You find spots to skateboard, a bench to hang out on, maybe a friend has a pool you can get in.

Eventually, you get arrested for loitering somewhere and learn that, without spending money, there's really nowhere for you to hang out with your friends here in corporate America's boring playground.

Given this fact, the big destination for many of us, a refuge among the boringness of Suburban life, is the Loch Raven Reservoir, a massive lake that drains through the Loch Raven Dam into Baltimore City's water pipes.

Though it's illegal, everyone and their dog goes swimming here, and it's not rare to come upon forty or fifty people hanging out on the rocks by the water. Others hike the trails, find spots to smoke a little pot, or build jumps for their mountain bikes.

The folks from the Blair Witch Project even filmed portions of their movie at Loch Raven. That might be our big claim to fame.

But in the woods surrounding the water, there are some interesting pieces of history that often go unnoticed or unappreciated and, though they are not as mysterious as the Blair Witch, they may be a bit more interesting.

And their legacy is very much alive today.

You may have come across old stone houses in the woods, or the dug-out remains of a basement or well. Maybe you've found artifacts of some other time or taken the side trail off Old Bosley Road that leads through the woods to the Merryman cemetery.

Maybe you've heard the legend that there is a town submerged beneath Loch Raven's waters, as some have who believe that scuba diving will yield amazing images or a sunken city.

Well, this is partly true. There is a town beneath Loch Raven, or at least, the remaining foundations of one, but don't expect to see it; it was dismantled almost one hundred years ago and anything that might remain has been covered with that many years of mud and silt.

Plus it's only under a couple feet of water, so save the scuba gear, because you'd only need a snorkel to go digging in the mud there. But visibility is probably less than an inch.

However, a self-motivated explorer can easily find some of the remains on the hill overlooking the old mill town and identify, with the help of photographs from the county library, some of the structures that remain. There's a fully intact set of brick steps, covered in ivy, which is a pretty cool thing to come across in the middle of the woods.

The steps led up to a large farm house, one of many in the town of Warren. The town's five-story textile factory and its associated structures used to stand right north of the current Warren Road Bridge, just east of Cockeysville.

Warren was a major textile employer, producing sails, tents, awnings, and other cotton duck products. It employed up to 1,000 people at its height, and became a major industrial hub for Baltimore County.

Along with Warren, parts of the Phoenix factory town and other small industrial sites, farm houses, and others homes were raised to make way for the flooding waters of the Gunpowder River, shortly after the turn of the last century.

While good work has been done by local historians to resurrect some of the stories of life in these towns, they has often focused on the well-off, the "gentlemen," and the stories told to historians and writers by the descendants of factory owners or managers.

The stories of the working people who built the town, harvested the stone for the houses, and cleared the area after its condemnation have not yet been adequately compiled.

As a laborer, a social justice activist, and a grassroots historian, I became interested in Warren. I

wondered what the story was behind the condemnation proceedings that helped clear the town out, perhaps if there had been resistance to these proceedings, if the people had tried to save their town.

I read on the Baltimore County Public Library's website that there had been a successful strike at the Phoenix Mill in 1853 for a ten-hour day. I wondered what the story was behind that, and to what extent organized workers played a part in shaping the culture of Baltimore County.

The details of these stories are scattered in various archived-documents, books, photographs, and newspaper clippings, and I attempted to find some of them. I stopped short of knocking on doors to dig through people's family archives, but that may be where the real stories lie.

With these scattered details, I compiled a partial narrative of some of the hidden history of this area of Baltimore County and of some of the battles fought by working people here.

The land that surrounded Warren was formerly hunting grounds for various native tribes including the Susquehannok, and was the home to much wildlife, which was killed with the Susquehannock after European conquest.

With the Europeans came slavery, and the land that surrounded Warren would later host numerous small slave plantations.

The extent of slavery in the area has not been well documented, and references to Africans and African Americans at Warren are few. But photographs from the early 1900s show numerous African Americans in the town.

John Thomas Scharf's history of the area describes a event after the Emancipation Proclamation, where a "stampede of slaves" left the neighborhoods by the Warren Factory" and headed down the York Road.[i]

Warren's existence very much relied on southern plantations before emancipation. In the early days of the 19th century, cotton produced on the large slave plantations of the southern states was shipped up to Cockeysville. From there, mule teams would haul the materials down to the factories at Warren and Phoenix on what would become Warren Road.

The factories at Warren and Phoenix, eventually both owned by the infamous Warren Manufacturing Company, were typical small towns of early industrial America, with feudal and paternalistic employment schemes, exhausting hours, and tight-knit families. Life in them was very much controlled by the owners of the mills.

The company often employed entire families, "including children ten years old."[ii] Children were employed "as soon as they were able to do anything," according to historian Evelyn K. Wieland, who interviewed factory owners and mangers in the early twentieth century. [iii]

Days started at 5:00 am, with twenty-five minutes for lunch. At 5:00 pm another twenty-five minutes was given for dinner, and work continued until 8:00 pm.[iv] According to local historian Joanna A. Santos.

"In the early 1800s children labored 10-14 hours per day in the mill. When the hours of child labor were limited, the employers got around it by giving short rest periods during the day but, during these periods, they had to remain at the mill."[v]

In the 1820s, men working at these mills made between three and six dollars a week while women and

girls only made a dollar seventy five. Out of this, one twenty five had to be paid in bond.[vi]

Due to this organization of labor and life, families in Warren were generally very close to one another. "This was really understandable," says Santos, "when you consider the fact that most of the families had been living and working there for generations and were often related."[vii]

The company houses here were built with stone gathered in the woods nearby, and rented out for $.50 per room per month. The people bought goods at a general stores also maintained by the company, so, as Santos says, "the poor wages [the company] did pay came back into their possession in rents and purchases."[viii]

Multiple occurrences of natural and economic disaster caused the profitability of the mills to fall, and they were sold numerous times. In once case in 1834, a fire put almost the entire workforce out of work and the mill was subsequently sold.

By the 1870s, Summerfield Baldwin would purchase the mill and run it until it's watery demise in the early 1920s.

Workers at the mills under Baldwin "were never overpaid nor given very much leisure time," Summerfield says in his interview with Wieland, "but they were happy in their ignorance, knowing nothing else."

Wieland found that "it was the practice of the owners to bring into the work people with small children, so that they grew up in the mill and were favorably conditioned to it."[ix]

Up until 1912, Wieland says, no accident insurance was available at the Warren mills.

"A worker, previous to that date, could be badly injured or even killed, and neither he nor his family could demand any compensation whatever. There were three to four accidents in the mill every day."[x]

Not surprisingly, labor unrest resulted from the harsh conditions workers were subjected to in the early days of the mills.

As the industries grew around them, textile workers across Baltimore County organized for better wages and working conditions. Alongside them, workers from other factory-towns across the country did the same.

In 1845, 5,000 young women struck at several textile factories around Pittsburgh for a ten-hour day. The strike failed at the time, but within a few years a ten-hour law hit the books in Pennsylvania.

The ten-hour law was often ignored by factory owners, who managed to find ways around it. This caused another strike in 1848, where women workers "rushed to the gate, tore off the boards, fell upon a detachment of Allegheny police, and captured the factory." This strike reasserted worker power in the Pittsburgh textile factory-network and forced employers to recognize the ten-hour day.[xi]

According to Philip S. Foner's history of the U.S. labor movement, the ten-hour movement mutated in the 1850s in the hands of "middle-class reformers and political figures."

In 1853, for example, all factory workers in Media, Pennsylvania, won the ten-hour day "by joint contract between the employer and the employed." At a mass meeting to celebrate this achievement, the workers appointed two of their leaders to make a tour of the New England states to lecture on the need

to build strong unions and adopt collective bargaining procedure in the struggle for the ten-hour day.[xii]

The problem with these types of agreements, from a labor organizing perspective, was that power was not built and held in the hands of the workers, but was just written on paper as a mutual interest agreement. And many workers in early industrial American didn't see a "mutual interest" between them and the barons who ran the factories.

While other organizations, like those in New England, refused to go along with these tactics and continued building power among the workers, it seems the Baltimore County labor movement of the 1850s fit into the former category of employees working in good faith with the factory owners to achieve a mutually beneficial work-pace.

At Phoenix, workers organized for a ten-hour day and also held temperance meetings (an anti-alcohol movement). A series of "eminently successful" temperance meetings were held at the factory throughout October, November and December of 1853, where many people were said to have "taken the pledge." The sobriety movement was closely linked to the labor movement, and the two often acted in concert.[xiii]

In mid-December, Phoenix and Warren cotton workers joined workers from throughout Baltimore County and went on strike for a ten-hour day. At the time, workers in the Phoenix mills worked up to 13 hours a day, like those at Warren.

The Baltimore County Advocate agreed with the strikers:

> *If the mills will not pay by running ten hours a day, let them stop! But they will pay. We understand that the mills on Jones' Falls have adopted the ten hour system, and we hope that those on the other streams in our county will follow their example."[xiv]*

But only in Phoenix would the strike be a success. On Tuesday, January 9th the ten-hour day was initiated there, and it was celebrated at a temperance celebration that Sunday in the town of 150 people.[xv]

Phoenix joined other towns throughout the country that won the ten-hour day in the early 1850s and helped build the foundation of the labor movement to come. Foner sums it up:

> *It united the working class – skilled and unskilled, mechanics and factory operatives – and created a strong tradition of organization. Although many workers had not yet benefited by the ten-hour day by the time of the Civil War, the movement for the ten-hour day in the years of 1840-1860 was responsible for a distinct reduction in the number of hours normally working each week. By 1860, ten hours had become the standard working day for most skilled mechanics and unskilled laborers other than factory workers, although their working hours had also been reduced. [xvi]*

Political action in the county continued through the Civil War years, especially after the Emancipation Proclamation. In January of 1863, at the same time of the Emancipation "stampede" at Warren, a crowd of about fifty Baltimore County residents drove to a toll-booth along the Washington turnpike road and, in protest, refused to pay.

The gate operator locked the gate behind some of the protesters and refused to allow the others through. The Baltimore County Advocate reported:

> *The entire party then deliberately proceeded to tear up the posts, pull down the gates, &c. They then carried the dismantled superstructure to Gwynn's Falls, near by, and threw it overboard.[xvii]*

The industrial boom and the end of slavery, with the economic chaos that followed it, ushered in a new era for social organization. The 1860s and 1870s saw a steady rise in organizing among working people, both in their communities and at their jobsites.

Workers at Warren would be part of this, pressing again for the ten-hour day. Bruce describes well the conditions that led to the wave of strikes after the Civil War:

> *"Vicarious gore was a breakfast staple in those days. It came with the morning newspaper. When a man was caught in a machine or showered with molten iron or brutally beaten, every moan was rendered, every contusion, fracture, laceration and disfigurement described with a painter's feeling and a surgeon's vocabulary… Mine explosions were routine, factory mishaps normal and railroad accidents a matter of course. Even without the assistance of the internal combustion engine the Machine Age had begun to munch on its victims."[xviii]*

It was in this context that a second strike in 1874, in the midst of a national depression and in the context of a growing labor movement, was launched at Warren. This time the workers would win. Their victory included a limited work-day for minors and a ten-hour day.[xix]

The strike of 1874 was not an isolated incident, according to historian Bruce V. Roberts, but was tied to a wave of unrest stemming from the changing economy of industrial America:

> *The old citywide trade unions were outmoded when the postwar spread of railroads turned the whole continent into one big economic arena. Skilled workers met the new situation by organizing national craft unions, some thirty of them by 1870 with a membership of about 30,000. [xx]*

But the depression eroded many of the small craft unions, and squeezed wages across the country. Unions fought back with strikes in the textile, coal mining, and cigar making industries.

But many of these strikes failed and union membership was driven to a new low. The collapse of the unions, according to Bruce, "exposed Workers to the full shock of hard times." Daily wages fell by at least twenty-five percent between 1873 and 1876, and unemployment affected well over a million workers.[xxi]

All of this, including the County-wide strike of 1853 and the subsequent strike at Warren in 1874, can be understood as some of the small roads that led to the great rebellion of 1877, which began in the railyards a few miles south of Warren in Baltimore, as well as in the railyards of Martinsburg, WV.

It would become the country's first nation-wide strike and would see federal soldiers sent into American cities to repress strikers. And it would radically alter labor relations in the United States.

While much has been written about the Baltimore rebellion in 1877 and of its far-reaching impacts in the City, much of Warren's hidden history would drown with the town as the water of the Gunpowder River, backed up by the Loch Raven dam, swallowed it in 1923.

The flooding of the town and of the land nearby was full of controversy and social action as well, and the final legal framework established to clear the towns of their inhabitants would pit poor Baltimoreans against major developers almost one hundred years later.

In the late 1800s, The City of Baltimore, growing from the industrial boom and facing an increasing population, looked north to find water reserves. The planners agreed on the large valley system in the small hills north of Towson, along the Gunpowder River, where a small reservoir already sat.

The City began buying properties there as the century closed, and by the beginning of the new one, they turned their attention to the town of Warren. The entire town would have to go.

A secret deal struck between the Baltimore City Water Board and Summerfield Baldwin was made in 1908, following a first attempt in 1906. In the agreement, the City Water Board agreed to purchase the mills and other company-owned properties of Warren for two to three-times their value.

But the deal didn't stay a secret; it was widely exposed in the Baltimore Sun and a massive controversy arose, which found its way from the neighborhoods to the courts.

Residents of Baltimore and Baltimore County organized to vocalize their anger at the deal. A meeting of members of the East End Improvement Association met in Patterson Park on November 27, 1908 and condemned the decision:

> *"Several members contended that all the facts should be brought out and that the association should not commit itself until the Council committee finishes its investigation."[xxii]*

A few days later the Northwest Improvement Association met and almost unanimously passed a resolution condemning the deal.[xxiii] The Southwest Baltimore Improvement Association passed a resolution opposing the deal as well. The Sun reported:

It was said by the speakers that it was wrong for the officials to enter into a deal without the knowledge of the people, and they had offered a price unusually great for the property.[xxiv]

One angry Baltimore wrote a letter to the editor of the Baltimore Sun:

> *The corporations are given valuable franchises that they would pay large sums for if proper methods were pursued; they pay dividends on millions and taxes on thousands, and apparently the more watered dividends the less taxes, and the people sit complacently at home waiting for the official strangler to come with his noose and, if not take away the actual life of the wage-earner, to take the shoes from the feet of his children and the raiment from the back of his wife.*
>
> *…Our present water supply would be entirely adequate in all probability were water meters installed, at least until such time as we were protected by the bonding of those to whom we entrusted the spending of millions that come from but one source – the men, women and children who actually produce something – those whom we see in the early cold winter mornings, in rain or shine, in snow or sleet, who plod along to toil and produce that which makes our country its wealth, and without which there would be no millionaires, no multiplicity of office-holders seeking to find ways in which to secure the pap available in the spending without control (by bonded auditors or otherwise) of the vast sums collected from the hungry and toward which the rich barely contribute the widow's mite.[xxv]*

Another Baltimore resident wrote in the Sun that the Warren Deal was "the worst bungled piece of business in the history of Baltimore City."[xxvi]

"What is the much discussed Warren Deal?" another wrote. "An arrangement made for the taxpayers without their knowledge and approved without their consent." The writer continued:

*They said the Warren mill owners were afraid the workmen would stop if they found out they were to be employed for only two years in that locality!*

*Are workmen ever employed for a longer time?*

*Not often.*

*Do the people believe this was the reason?*

*Of course not.[xxvii]*

Similar statements came from bankers associations, politicians, and other assemblies of the people of Baltimore and Baltimore County.

In one response to the secret deal, Democratic State Senator John Charles Linthicum spoke words that ring especially true today, with the Wikileaks website publishing previously secret U.S. Embassy documents outlining the secret, and often illegal, dealings of the United States and its allies:

*"I am unalterably opposed to secrecy in public affairs. I do not think office-holders serving the public have any right to keep from the public matters in which they are interested. I have always fought in the Legislature for publicity and have fought for the printing and publication of all bills introduced in the Legislature, because I believe publicity in public affairs is the great bulwark against fraud and corruption, and believing this to be the case, I cannot understand, if this agreement of purchase is a good thing for the taxpayers, why it should have been kept secret until after the voters passed upon the loan."[xxviii]*

After years of deliberations, public discussion, and testimonies, it was determined that the City's Water Board did in fact break laws, which caused some of its members to resign and others to stubbornly defend their position.

But an agreement was finally reached with the Warren Manufacturing Company to sell their properties to the City, a decade and a half after initially attempting the deal. The City purchased the Warren Manufacturing Company, both the Warren and Phoenix Mills and their associated properties, for $1,000,000.[xxix]

Out of the litigation stemming from the initial controversy came a new law for Maryland, the Right of Eminent Domain (Chapter 117, article 33 A). This law allowed Baltimore City to condemn some of the properties at Warren after the owners failed to meet the City's desired price.

According to Wieland, "there was so much opposition to the bill that a clerk of the court had been bribed to send to the Governor the won version of the bill when it was to signed."[xxx]

The tale of displacement at Warren has been lived by people all over the world, where business interests for the supposed greater good are held high above the rights of people to their homes and communities.

The same Eminent Domains law used to clear out Warren would be used at the behest of Johns Hopkins and a coalition of private-developers in 2003 to throw almost 1,000 people out of their homes in East Baltimore.

But unlike the residents of Middle East, who formed a large coalition of neighbors and fought a rather epic grassroots battle against the Hopkins "vampire,"[xxxi] the people of Warren put up little organized resistance to eviction and condemnation.

"There was no concerted resistance among the adults," says a former resident, according to documents cited in a 1989 Baltimore City Paper article. "There was nothing like the organizations you have these days… people were unhappy, but they had no choice but to leave."[xxxii]

According to another resident, "some people were upset, naturally. They had worked in the mill all their lives. Others just took it in stride – as progress, you know."[xxxiii]

Adding insult to injury, wealthy landowners were paid much higher sums per acre than poor folks were. The Ridgely family was paid $225 an acre where others nearby were only given $50 per acre.[xxxiv] The Matthews Estate, which owned land on which the new Paper Mill Road bridge would be built, received over $1,000 an acre.[xxxv] Land purchased from Robert Garret, the president of the commission in charge of deciding which land to buy and for how much, received almost $2,000 an acre.[xxxvi]

As they fell into the hands of the City, the factories, mills, houses, and other structures of these towns were taken apart in piece by workers and sent off to be re-used. The rest was cleared out or just left in the woods nearby.

Workers began arriving to take the town apart and begin raising the dam in the spring of 1921, some walking all the way from Baltimore. The dam would be the largest architectural feat in Baltimore County at the time.

The workers would live in racially-segregated tent-cities on site, and would do the grunt work of the dam-raising; mostly mixing, pouring, and finishing the concrete, and building the elaborate forms needed to hold the massive weight of it.[xxxvii]

On March 28, 1921, a one-hundred acre forest fire hit the camps, started accidentally by workers making coffee. Firefighters and camp workers extinguished it before it caused too much damage. [xxxviii]

While construction of the dam began to the south, residents of Warren and other areas in the north of the reservoir project were still fighting to get their fair share from the displacement they were facing. Residents in East Baltimore would fight for similar concessions from Johns Hopkins and the City of Baltimore in the early 2000s.

On July 7, 1921, a "large delegation of residents of Warren" demonstrated at a hearing at the Baltimore County Commissioner's office, calling for the county to abandon plans to demolish the bridge across the Gunpowder River.[xxxix]

Residents argued that they would be cut off from the cemetery where their families were buried, and many would be cut off from their church services. The New Era newspaper reported;

> *"It was stated that such action [demolishing the bridge] would leave a large number of people isolated and some would have to make a detour of as much as eight miles to reach Baltimore. [xl]*

In response to this pressure, the County sued the City, pressing for an injunction to stop any further flooding that would "destroy or render impassable, in whole or in part" any public roads or bridges in the County.[xli]

The City responded with further threats of condemnation, this time of County roads and bridges.[xlii] A few weeks later, the City proposed that the County, with City funding, should rebuild any roads or bridges that would be affected by the flooding.

The county refused, upholding their injunction against further flooding. A week later, the County won their lawsuit, bringing the residents of Warren what they had demanded. The City would have to build new bridges and roads to replace those they would destroy before they could continue flooding the area.[xliii]

Warren residents then compelled the County to relocate the Warren school, and the Ridgely estate offered to donate the land needed for it.[xliv]

While all this was happening, the City was busy obtaining land in the area at the threat of condemnation.

In January of 1922, the City initiated condemnation proceedings against several small property owners at Warren and Phoenix. The Baltimore Sun wrote at the time that the City had said it had been deemed impossible to agree with the owners on a fair price.[xlv]

Considering how the City originally had agreed to pay the Warren Manufacturing Company more than twice what their property was worth, it is absurd that they pulled out condemnation proceedings against people for small, couple-acre properties.

In the end, very little condemnation occurred at Warren, though the threat of using it led many to sell their homes quickly, lest the price go down in a court proceeding. And that the city began flooding the area before they had finished purchasing all the properties, did essentially force people from their homes.

The flooding began on April 11, 1922, slowly backing up 23,000,000,000 gallons of water into the former towns of Baltimore County, while the City still had properties to buy and had still not completed purchase of the Phoenix Mill.,[xlvi]

“The homes were the last ones to go,” says former Warren resident Wilton L. Howard in a 1951 Baltimore Sun article. “But when the wreckers got around to breaking up the houses, even the diehards had to leave.”[xlvii]

He describes some residents being “ankle-deep in water” before leaving, stubbornly refusing to leave the town they called home.

On April 6, 1923, the Baltimore Sun announced the disappearance of the town of Warren under 20,000,000,000 gallons of water.

The residents of Warren would then be dispersed across the region. Some would settle in the textile neighborhood of Hamden in Baltimore, others would go to mills in the surrounding areas.

The story of Warren of Phoenix, and the areas surrounding them, seems of little relevance to the rest of the world. Who cares about two small towns in Baltimore County?

But when viewed in the context of the wider struggles for better working conditions and wages, and for human rights in times of human displacement caused by the overseers of a shifting economy, it becomes a microcosm of a much wider story.

Whether it’s a small village resisting the construction of a World Bank mega-dam in India or China, or a community in an impoverished community in the United States fighting against corporate-led “development,” these stories constitute a different version of history, one told by the trials and

tribulations of regular people.

And just as the ruins of Warren can be found still in the woods surrounding the "lost city," so too can the ruins caused by the policy of Eminent Domain that led to Warren's condemnation can be found in the abandoned row-homes of East Baltimore, or in the stories of thousands of former residents who, like those of Warren, were displaced throughout the Baltimore area.

Giving voice to these stories can help us stand for what some of us today call "The Right to the City," wrestling control of communities, workplaces, and municipalities away from those who would abuse people and putting it into the hands of those would to serve their interests.

Or better yet, putting that power into the hands of those who live the daily experiences of the City.

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