

SECTION II: MARYLAND TRANSPORTATION HISTORY

THE EARLY TRANSPORTATION NETWORK, 1631-1800

Geography's Influence

Maryland's distinctive physiography has greatly influenced the development of its transportation network. The is divided into Tidewater, Piedmont, and Appalachian Plateau geographic regions. The Tidewater, or Coastal Plain, area, including the Maryland portion of the so-called "Delmarva" peninsula between Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, as well as parts of Southern Maryland watered by tributaries of the Bay, is characterized by mostly flat or gently undulating terrain crisscrossed by partly tidal streams and rivers such as the lower Patapsco, the lower Patuxent and the Potomac, the Severn, and the Choptank and Nanticoke rivers. Between the fall line and the mountains of western Maryland lies the variegated Piedmont region; in this region the waterways feeding Chesapeake Bay have cut valleys in hilly terrain where Maryland's major building stones, including granites, sandstones, marbles, and slates are found (Maryland Geological Survey 1990). Lastly, the mountainous region of the westernmost sections of Maryland forms part of the steep Appalachian Plateau, a significant American geographic feature marking the first "continental divide" (the only one east of the Mississippi) encountered by road-builders seeking to link Maryland to the Midwest and the West (Mitchell and Muller 1979:1-2) (Figure 1).

Maryland's primarily Tidewater counties include the "Eastern Shore" counties of Worcester, Somerset, Wicomico, Dorchester, Caroline, Talbot, Queen Anne's, and Kent, and the counties of St. Mary's, Calvert, and Charles, west of the Chesapeake Bay. Parts of Cecil, Harford, Baltimore, Anne Arundel, and Howard counties below the fall line also belong to Tidewater territory. These counties also include Piedmont topography, which characterizes all of Carroll County, and nearly the whole of Montgomery County. Baltimore City, encompassing both the lower Patapsco valley (including Baltimore Harbor) and the reaches of Jones Falls and Gwynns Falls above the fall line, is also a mixed Tidewater/Piedmont area. The western counties of Washington, Allegany, and Garrett are in the Appalachian Plateau; but Frederick County straddles the Piedmont and Appalachian regions (Mitchell and Muller 1979:i, 1-2) (Figure 2).

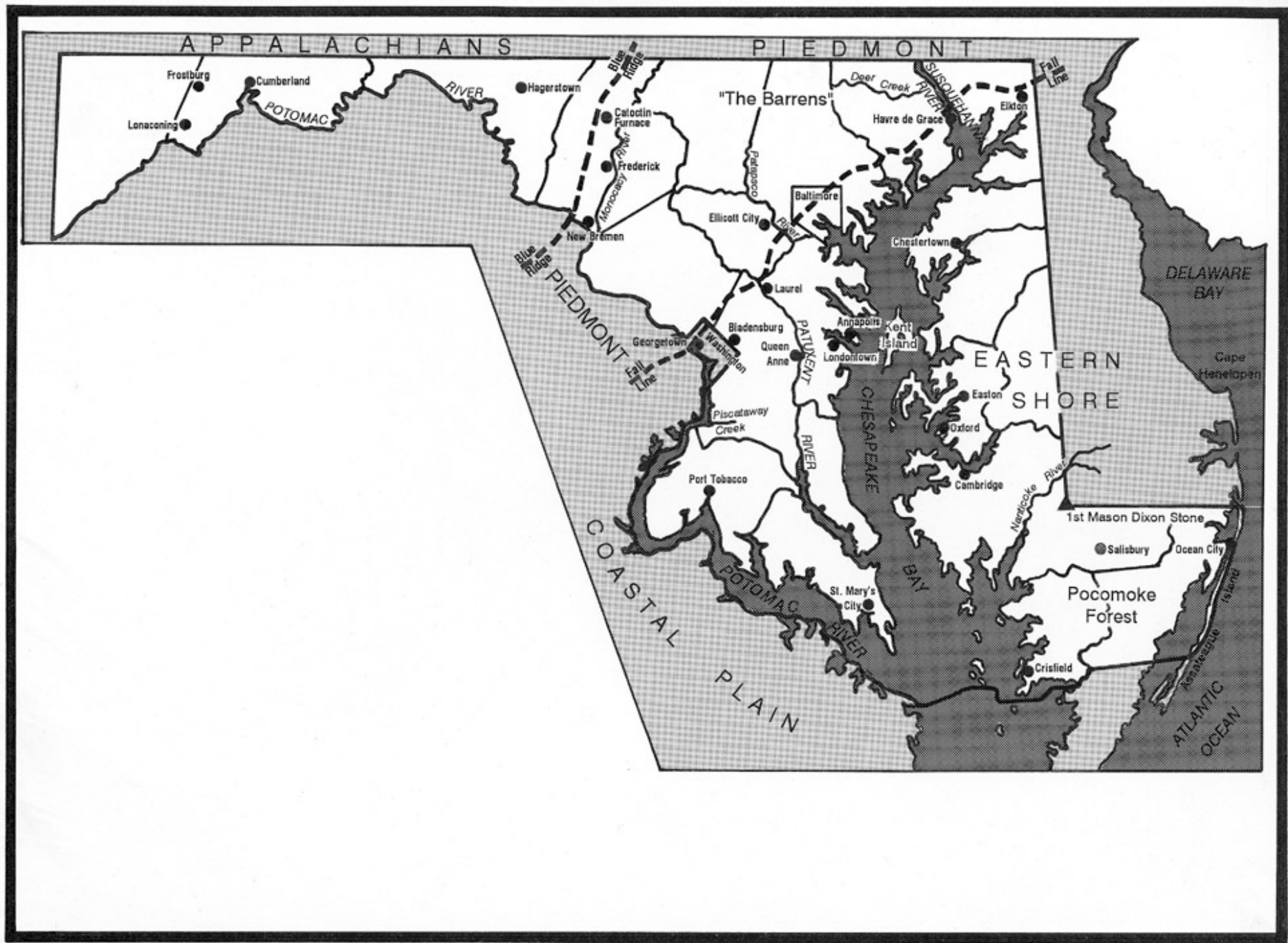


FIGURE 1: Maryland Geographic Regions

SOURCE: Mitchell and Muller 1979

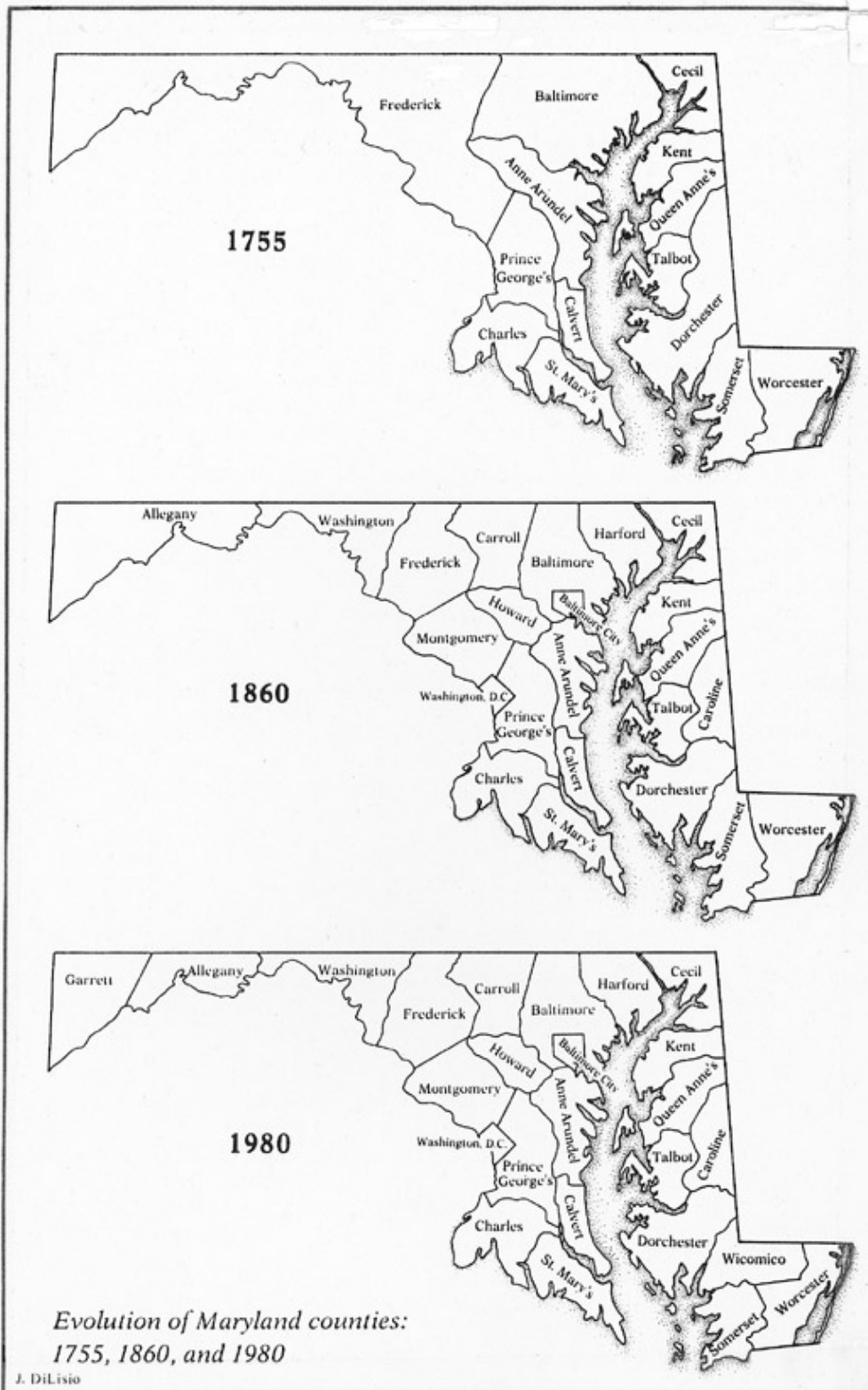


FIGURE 2: Evolution of Maryland Counties: 1755, 1860, and 1980

SOURCE: Brugger 1988