

A Brief Business History of Allen, Maryland: In Brief

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To

John Culp, Board Chair

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Business History of Allen, Maryland: In Brief

Local economies are comprised of a variety of businesses providing goods and services for the community and outlying regions. A closer look at these economies reveals that businesses also provide employment and skill development for residents as well as places that benefit social interaction in the community. This study examines the development of select businesses in a small community on the Eastern Shore of Maryland that has roots back to the seventeenth century.

This study traces the development of some local businesses of the region to display the roles they played in the community. Microhistories of various businesses in the three sectors of: processing and services, agribusiness, and retail/commerce are discussed. The study draws on recollections of citizens as found in the newsletter of the local historical society, correspondence, and oral histories supplemented by primary materials from a regional archive as well as secondary sources.

The discussion reviews the various roles businesses played in community and economic development. It poses some unanswered questions as well as draws some implications for the importance of local histories.

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Introduction

Rural America is dotted with small towns and villages. Maryland's Eastern Shore (the Delmarva Peninsula) is no exception. Like many states on the Eastern Seaboard, Maryland has villages that date back to the 17th century. After all, Captain John Smith explored the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries via his vessel the Phoenix in 1608.¹ The village of Allen, Maryland in Wicomico County is one such example of how an isolated village developed its own economy to help sustain it over the years until it became linked more broadly to surrounding communities through improved communications and transportation. In recent years there has been a growth in developing history of local peoples and their communities, especially with the growth of the public history movement in the 1970s. Unlike previous eras, the focus on public history began to examine the history of non-elites, the marginalized (e.g., women, immigrants, Blacks, etc.), the tales from "down under."² As the *Organization of American Historians* noted, "...All people have been significant actors in human events... history is not limited to the study of dominant political, social and economic elites... . It also encompasses the individual and collective quests of ordinary people for a meaningful place for themselves in their families, in their communities, and the larger world."³ In this vein historians have examined local histories, women's history, history of ethnic and racial groups, and immigrants among other groups not normally studied. Of particular interest here is the study of local communities and their history. Such studies may be about preserving the memory of places, people, buildings, culture, or institutions. Another purpose is to identify and

¹ Tudor Jenks, *Captain John Smith* (New York: Century, 1904), 186.

² Robert Kelly, "Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects," *The Public Historian* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1978), 16-28.

³ "History of Ordinary People," *Organization of American Historians Newsletter*, (February 1991), 6.

preserve the heritage of peoples and places that may lead to concrete efforts to preserve materials, buildings, and historic districts ⁴. In recent years local history has also focused on the local economy and business. Since a general history of Allen has been written by native son George R. Shivers,⁵ this study examines some of the business institutions that have defined the economy of the village of Allen and its region. Previous local business histories have tended to focus on a single business or industry.⁶ This study examines a select number of businesses that developed in the Allen region spanning three centuries to understand not only the basis of the local economy but also its socio-cultural impact on the region.

The purpose of this study is to reveal that local business institutions served not only to provide goods and services to the community, but they also provided places of employment, socialization, and belonging contributing to the village's sense of community. In addition, both the types of businesses and the products and services offered changed over time due to changing needs, opportunities, and technology. This study adopts methods of public and local history including: micro histories and the use of oral histories.⁷ Specifically, this study employs a micro-historical approach by focusing on case profiles of a select number of firms and their contributions to the

⁴ See for example: Raphael Samuel, "Theaters of Memory," in *The Public History Reader*, eds. Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (London: Routledge, 2013), 11-29; B. Dicks, *Heritage, Place and Community* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000); and Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, "The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life," in *The Public History Reader*, eds. Hilda Kean and Paul Martin (London: Routledge, 2013), 30-55.

K&M ch 3; Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016), Ch. 2.

⁵ George R. Shivers, *Changing Times : Chronicle of Allen, Maryland, an Eastern Shore village* (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 1998). ⁶

See for example Andrew Popp, *Entrepreneurial Families: Business, Marriage and Life in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2013); R. Lee Burton, Jr., *Canneries of the Eastern Shore* (Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1986).

⁷ Rosenzweig and Thelen, "The Presence of the Past," 48.

economic and social fabric of the community of Allen. Such an approach humanizes the institutions that contributed to the community and its economy. This research incorporates a couple of historical genres as it focuses on historical business and economic activities, but it also reflects some of the social and cultural aspects of the firms' roles in the community. Primary documents used included articles derived from correspondence and interviews of residents or their descendants as published in the newsletter of the local historical society the *Allen Historian*. In addition, the author conducted interviews with citizens familiar with selected businesses (oral histories). Local newspaper articles and other published material of the era provided additional primary material. These sources were supplemented by secondary sources to provide context and additional interpretation.

The rest of the paper unfolds as follows. First, some of the history of the Allen area is provided for context. Then the paper examines how selected businesses in three broad sectors (i.e., processing and services, agribusiness, and retail/commerce) contributed to the economy and the community of Allen. Finally, a discussion section reviews some key themes and poses some unanswered questions as well as draws some implications for the importance of local histories.

Some Historical Context of Allen, MD

The following brief history of the Village of Allen will identify some of the major forces that shaped the village from its founding and created the community that exists today. This study adopts the following definition of *community* as, "... a group of people who share a common sense of identity based on place, religion, activity, or ethnic belonging."⁴

⁴ Cauvin, *Public History*, 96.

As noted earlier the community of Allen is located on Maryland's Eastern Shore on a peninsula east of the Chesapeake Bay. As one author noted, "The Chesapeake Bay is one of the rich agricultural regions of the earth,..."⁵ The Bay's estuaries created fertile land for a variety of crops. Since the colonial times, Maryland had been an agricultural center, beginning first with tobacco and then grains (wheat and corn).⁶ In 1672 William Brereton of Virginia moved to Somerset County in Maryland and founded a 500 acre plantation at the fork of the Wicomico and Passerdyke Creeks off the Wicomico River. The patent for the land was provided by his father-in-law, Colonel Samuel Smith. Brereton became a prominent citizen serving as Justice of the Peace and later as High sheriff for the county.⁷ At the time agriculture was the primary business, and tobacco was the primary crop of the region. The large farms used both indentured servants from England and black slaves from Africa for labor.⁸ Free Blacks also settled into the county from Virginia.⁹ After a time, farmers changed crops because the marshy lands of Somerset County provided a poor-quality tobacco. By 1730 corn had become the cash crop in the northern part of the county.¹⁰ In the mid eighteenth century, the larger plantations were broken up by either selling land or dividing it among heirs. The result was more housing on smaller acreage, and the

⁵ G.H. Williams, Chair Editorial Committee. *Maryland, Its Resources, Industries, and Institutions* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1893), 265.

⁶ Paul Musselwhite, *Urban Dreams, Rural Commonwealth: The Rise of Plantation Society in the Chesapeake* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 246.

⁷ Shivers, *Changing Times*, 4-5. Somerset County was established by Cecil, Lord Baltimore of the Province of Maryland in 1666.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11-13

⁹ Paul Baker Touart. *Somerset, An Architectural History* (Annapolis, MD: Maryland Historical Trust, 1990), 22; a census for 1755 listed 93 free blacks and by 1800 there were 586, but the plantation economy offered few opportunities for free blacks.

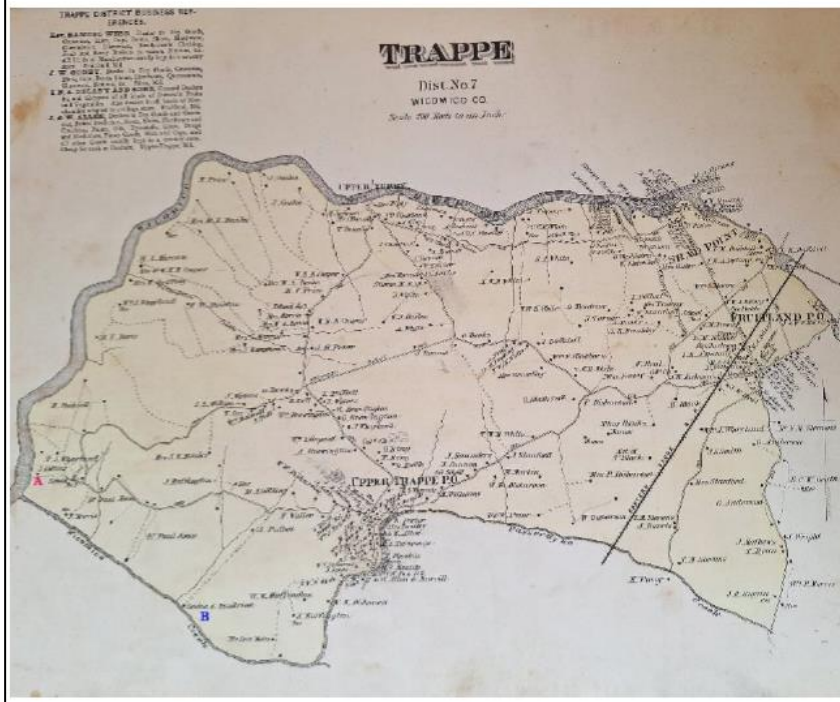
¹⁰ Lois Green Carr, "Diversification in the Colonial Chesapeake: Somerset County, Maryland, in Comparative Perspective," in *Colonial Chesapeake Society*, Lois Green Carr et al., eds. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press), 353-354.

beginnings of a village occurred in mid 1700s. People attracted churches with the Stepney Parrish (Anglican) being the first in the area. Later it was followed by the Asbury (white) and Friendship (African American) Methodist churches located right in the village.¹¹ Churches provided opportunities for fellowship and community service. A few small schools emerged near large plantations to provide education for the landowners' children and added another institution to help define a community. The first public school in the village was founded by Mary Allen in 1838 in her home. She also worked in a local store, and her sons later opened their own general merchandise store. A school existed in the village until 1887 when a separate building (community center today) was built near the Asbury Church. In 1937 Wicomico County consolidated its schools in Fruitland and Salisbury, and Allen no longer had its own school.¹²

¹¹ Shivers, *Changing Times*, 49; Carr, "Diversification in the Colonial Chesapeake," 353 -354.

¹² *Ibid.*, 79-80, 139-141. ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28-29, 32-33 ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

Figure 1a. Map Trappe, Dist. 7

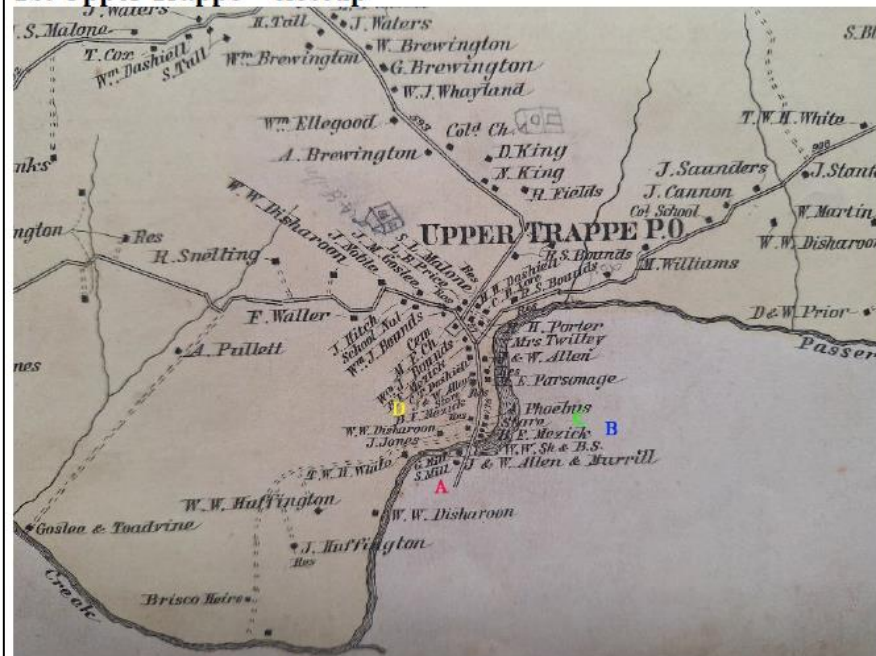


Legend

A – Collins Wharf approx. location

B – Payne Marina, approx. location

1b. Upper Trappe – closeup



Legend

A. Grist and Saw Mill

B. Messick Cannery

C. Store (Adams)

D. J & W Allen Store

Source: Lake, Griffing and Stevenson. *Atlas of Wicomico, Somerset and Worcester Counties, Md.* (Philadelphia, PA: Lake, Griffing and Stevenson, 1877), 15.

Another factor that helped create a sense of community was the establishment of two mills on the Passerdyke Creek by brothers John and William Adams. They created a “trap” or dam to provide water power for the grist mill and later across the pond a sawmill, see Figure 1a for map of the area with the mills marked “A” noted near the bottom of Figure 1b. These were the early non-agricultural business ventures in the village that became known as Upper Trappe (to distinguish it from Trappe to the south). They took advantage of the area’s waterways. The Adams’s also had a shop believed to be a store. A tavern was also believed to be located near the mills.¹⁷ Shivers notes that the, “...village arose around the business establishments of the Adams brothers... .”¹⁸ Later the waterways would provide another business at Collins Wharf that received goods and passengers transported by ships on the bay and its rivers.¹³ In the late 1830s there was considerable excitement that the Peninsula Line of the Eastern Shore Railroad might be routed through Upper Trappe. However, the railroad chose a more direct line between the two larger towns of Salisbury and Princess Anne and the “local” station was placed at Loretto a few miles away.¹⁴

The Civil War divided the village of Upper Trappe as it did throughout the region and the state. There were incidents where one neighbor might feed passing union soldiers while another was hiding a confederate soldier in their home. The town lost sons on both sides during the war. In 1864 when the slaves were freed, many in the area had nowhere to go and stayed and worked

¹³ Ibid., 101.

¹⁴ John C. Hayman, *Rails Along the Chesapeake: A History of Railroad on the Delmarva Peninsula, 1827 – 1978* (Marvadel Publishers, 1979), 68. The village of Loretto no longer exists,; it was absorbed by Fruitland. ²¹ Shivers, *Changing Times*, 96-97, 106 (Civil War), 100 (name change to Allen). ²² Ibid., 157.

on the farms where they had once been enslaved or worked in the lumber industry on the peninsula. After the Civil War, in 1867, Wicomico County was created out of parts of Somerset and Worcester Counties. The county seat was Salisbury, and Upper Trappe was on the southern boundary of the new county bordering its former county, Somerset. Another change came in 1882 when Upper Trappe was renamed Allen because the post office felt there were too many villages with the name of Trappe. It was named after J. S. C. Allen a store owner and post master at the time of the name change.²¹

Allen experienced many depressions felt in the rest of the country such as the ones in 1850s, 1870s, 1890s, and the 1930s. During these periods, villagers often bartered with each other for goods as money was scarce. Rural electrification came to the region via the New Deal Program in the 1930s. As one friend wrote to Lillian Shivers, an Allen resident, “ ‘ So glad to hear your home is now lighted by electricity. Adds so much to the attractiveness as well as the convenience. ‘ ”.²² Despite the economic setbacks, the village like the rest of the nation seemed to rebound, often because they had no other choice and because they maintained a strong work ethic.

In the post -World War II era, African Americans had more opportunities and took them. The farms then depended on migrant workers from as far south as Florida. Ten Allen area farmers organized to build labor camps to house the migrants. During the growing season, the migrants proved to be a large market for the area’s stores.¹⁵ Beginning in the 1950-60s, farms were subdivided into residential lots. During the 1990s a larger development was planned, but after a

¹⁵ “Local Farmers Build Labor Camps for Migrant Workers,” *Salisbury Advertiser and Wicomico Countian*, 3 March 1955, 6.

public hearing, it was scaled back. The result was a smaller development but still the town's largest residential neighborhood. These new homes brought new residents who did not share the same history nor were necessarily church goers. Other institutions came in to take up the slack such as the Lions Club, the community center (converted from the old school) to hold events, a new fire station, as well as the Allen Historical Society founded in 1995 to help preserve the history and culture of

Allen and its environs.¹⁶ The village has also developed new traditions such as the annual 4th of July parade started in the 1980s and the Cemetery Walk to learn about past figures in the town's history. At the close of the twentieth century, Allen was still segregated by neighborhoods and churches. The county schools in Salisbury were fully integrated.

This brief history of Allen reveals that it is a community based primarily on a shared sense of identity based on place and activities. The ethnic belonging, even within racial groups does not seem to persist as much as it did in the early years. Businesses also seem to have contributed to a sense of community through their activities. In the sections that follow, selected businesses that emerged in the Allen over the years are examined to more closely see how they contributed to the economy, sense of place, and of community.

¹⁶ Shivers, *Changing Times*, 174-176; Allen Historical Society, "About Us," <http://www.allenhistoricalsociety.org/> (accessed 26 March 2024).

Profiles of Selected Businesses of Allen Through the Years

From the earliest beginnings of the European settlement of Upper Trappe (later Allen) business activity has been part of its history. Agriculture has always been featured given the area's fertile soil and rural environs. However, as the community developed, a wide variety of different types of businesses emerged to provide goods and services for the local people and its surrounding region in Wicomico and Somerset Counties. To provide the sense of breadth and depth of business activity, profiles of businesses in three different sectors are presented in the fields of: processing and services, agribusiness, and retail/commerce. The intent is to show both the breadth and the contributions of businesses that developed over the centuries. Table 1 reveals a census of a select twenty-seven businesses that developed in Allen since the seventeenth century. While it does not cover all the businesses, it does provide a sense of the numbers and types of businesses that flourished in the area over the years.

Table 1. Census of Selected Businesses in Allen, MD

Business	Business Name & Owner/Managers	Activity	Years
Processing & Services			
Grist Mill	<i>Adams Mill</i> Willaim Brereton, Jr.	Grist mill built to ground grains (corn, wheat).	1702
	John, William, and Andrew Adams	Adams brothers purchased the mill and ran it for many years	1769 – 1800s
	George A. Dashiell	Mill changed hands many times over the years: James Dashiell (1818 -1841), Purnell Toadvine (1841 – 1863), Sidney Malone (1863-1874), Benjamin Messick (1874-75)	1818- 1875
	Many other owners sold it to Samuel Graham/ Woodland Wallace		1886 -1904
	Beverly Hitch(owner)/ Robert Hotch (manager)	In 1919 mill was razed to make way for new road and bridge after the damn was washed out in a storm.	1904 - 1919
Saw Mill	<i>Saw Mill</i> Adams family, et al.	Cut logs floated up the Passerdyke Creek with an up and down saw.	1763 – 1882

	Benjamin Messick and William Disharoon	Later replaced with a steam saw. Later the mill also made wooden baskets for strawberry picking.	1882 – 1886
	Wilson Todd		1886 - 1918
Wharf/dock	<i>Collins Wharf</i> James and Susan Collins	Sail boats and steam boats brought cargo and passengers up Passerdyke Creek from the Wicomico River and beyond.	1860 – 1882
	Maryland Steamboat Co. of Baltimore	It served as a landing for Baltimore, Chesapeake & Atlantic RR Co. in 1912 and beyond.	1882 – 1920
		Arlington and Olive Moore bought the land for their farm, see Collins Sod Farm below	1920
Ice House	<i>Allen Ice House</i> ^a Peter Malone	During the winter, ice was cut from the pond and placed in a cave dug into the side of the hill near the cemetery at the corner of the present Allen and Collins Wharf roads. During the summer, ice was sold to residents to use in their ice boxes and to make ice cream.	1890s – early 1900s
Cannery	<i>W.F. Messick Bros.</i> Harry Messick	Canned tomatoes on land formerly housing the saw mill. A fire burned down the cannery in December, 1926. It was never rebuilt.	1899 – 1926
Boat Yard	<i>Payne Marina</i> Luther & Mary Payne	The Paynes operated marina on the Wicomico Creek. The Marina sold and serviced Chris Craft yachts that were made in Salisbury. The Marina changed hands three times after the Paynes sold it.	1930s – 1954

	<i>Wikander Marina</i>	Stuart Wikander bought the marina in 1980 and runs it today. He provides slips, storage and performs maintenance and mechanical work for customers.	1980-pres.
Blacksmith	<i>Blacksmith Shops (3)^b</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. John Huffington had a blacksmith shop near the pond earlier. Perry Horseman later worked there. When the mill closed, the shop was moved across the stream near the old post office. 2. James Smith owned a shop near the mill. 3. One on the north side of the mill was run by Robert Griffith. Mary Payne's (marina) father in late 1800s to early 1900s. He made and repaired tools, shod horses. He worked mostly in the shop but occasionally took tools out to farms as needed. 	1700s – early 1900s
Auto service	<i>Somerset Garage^c</i> Ralph Bounds	Ralph Bounds built and ran a full-service garage to fix and maintain cars, change tires, and pump gas. The building was made in part from timbers and stone from the grist mill. Ralph had helped the Hitches take the mill down.	1923 – 1950s
Auto service	<i>Buddy's Garage^d</i> Buddy Malone	Built in 1920 by Buddy Malone at the corner of Allen and Cathell roads. He performed auto repairs but did not sell gasoline.	1920s-1930s
Agribusiness			
Strawberry plants	<i>W. F. Allen & Co.^e</i>	Allen started the strawberry plant farm in 1885; he had been in general farming prior to that. At the time of his death in 1949, Allen had 900 acres of plants and orchards and shipped 10-12 million strawberry plants and 100-150K bushels of peaches and apples annually. He is credited with introducing melons to the Easten shore. He was a prominent businessman in Salisbury and surrounding area serving as President of the Rotary Club, President of a Bank, on the Board of County Commissioners among other positions.	1885 -1950s

Produce Auction	<i>Produce Auction Block</i> Jesse Pollitt	Pollitt earned a penny a package for everything sold on the block. During its peak, 10,000-12,000 bushels of string beans were sold daily. The University of Maryland declared the Allen produce block the string bean capital of the world.	1930s – 1950s
Strawberry plants	<i>J. H. Shivers</i> Jay and Rose Shivers	Worked for John Jones of Allen since 1926 and bought the business in 1933. His wife Rose and daughters also worked in the business. The Shivers sold 21 different strawberry plant varieties nationally and abroad.	1933 – late 1960s
Sod Farm	<i>Collins Wharf Sod Farm</i> Arlington and Olive Moore Fred and Susan Moore and family	Arlington and Olive bought the land and started Farming. Their son Fred and his family later took over. Today the Collins Wharf farm has over 600 acres devoted to various types of grasses. It has proven to be a profitable enterprise for Fred, Jr. and his son Eddie.	1920 -pres. 1970s – pres.
Winery	<i>Bordeleau Vineyards</i> Tom Shelton	Tom Shelton a former executive in the poultry processing industry turned his hobby into a thriving winery business. He grows a variety of grapes to produce white, red, and rose wines. He has made the winery a destination for tourists and events such as weddings and fund raisers taking advantage of the growth in agro tourism. Bordeleau is on the Chesapeake Wine Trail. Bordeleau wines have won numerous awards over the years, and its wines are listed among the best in the region by <i>Wine Enthusiast</i> .	1998-pres.
Retail & Commerce			
Store	<i>N/A</i> Adams family	Located near the mills on the “trap” pond	Late 17 th to early 18 th cent.
General Store	<i>J. & W. Allen^f</i>	The store was a dealer in dry goods, groceries, medicines, boots, hardware, fancy goods, hats and caps. Prices were cheaper if paid in cash or produce. It was a major community center and place of business. The Allen Cotillion Club held dances on the store's second floor and other	1848 -1893

	Joseph S. C. Allen and William Francis Allen	organizations met there as well. J. S. C. Allen was postmaster and the one after whom the village was named. The store burned down in 1893.	
Liquor Store	<i>N/A</i> ^g O'Neil	The store burned down in a fire in 1890s; vandals were suspected.	1880s -1890s
Store	<i>Whayland Store</i> ^h Ernest Whayland (1893-98) W.F. and Minnie Messick (1900 -1914) Kirby Hitch (1914-1917) Lewis A. Whayland (1917 – 1940s)	The store was operated by several people, but Lewis Whayland owned and operated it the longest. The Whayland store was originally part of the community of Trinity at the corner of Yacht Club Road and the ferry landing. Later the store was moved to Collins Wharf Rd. "People brought him chickens and eggs for trading," recalled his daughter Mrs. Harrington. Lewis would go to Salisbury to buy his groceries from wholesalers. Coal and oil were delivered to the store by horse and wagon.	1893 – 1940s
General Store	<i>George Phillips</i> George Phillips Lillian Phillips Shivers Elliotts	A former farmer, Phillips built his store and home in 1900 on the site of the former J. W. Allen store. It was a place where people socialized as well as shopped. George ran the store until 1933, and his oldest daughter Lillian took it over and ran it until 1946. She sold it to the Elliotts who ran the store until the mid-fifties. The property was then turned into residences.	1900 – 1933 1933-1946 1946-1950s
Store	<i>O. O. Banks</i> ⁱ Oliver Banks	Oliver Banks sold his freight sailing vessels and bought a building from Jesse Pollitt where he operated a service station and general store. He sold everything from furniture to car batteries. In 1950s the store was robbed of \$300 after hours. Banks ran the store until 1965.	19?? - 1965
General Store	<i>Peninsula Farm Market</i>	Built by Jesse Pollitt and run mostly by his family. It sold general merchandise, food, medicines, animal feed. Sold gas and provided light	1924 -2000

	Kolb Family-David, Sr., Mary Lee, David Jr., Melissa Bright, et al.	service (oil, tires) for autos. It was the longest running store and the last store in Allen during the 20 th century.	
	Upper Ferry Stores ^j	Stores below catered to African Americans during segregation.	
General Store	<i>Brewington Store</i> ^k Joseph & Louisa Brewington	General Store.	1910 – 1960s
Club/bar	<i>Nick's Peaceful Palace</i> ^l Nick & Naomi Banks	NPP had a small store as the emphasis was on bar and night club; it also had a barber shop in the main store. NPP was within walking distance of Ray's Place, but both firms had their own clientele, the Banks were cousins of Celestine Church	1948-1960s
Store, club, bar & barber shop	<i>Rays Place</i> ^m Ray and Celestine Church	A combination grocery store, beer garden, and barbershop located on the lot in front of the Church's residence. For ten years, it was the family's chief source of income.	1950s- 1960s
Store	<i>Perry's Store</i> Perry Polk	General store. Polk was an uncle of Celestine Church.	1950s- 1960s
Store	<i>Pat and Audrey Hall's Store</i> The Halls	The Halls sold groceries and gasoline. Corner of Upper Ferry and Walnut Tree rds.	1970s – 1980s

Note citations here are only for those business not profiled in the text. ^a Shivers, *Changing Times*, 134. ^b Casey Parsons, "Thornton Hitch's Reflections," *Allen Historian* 6, no. 2 (2000), 3-4; ^c Howard Norris, "The Somerset Garage," in *The Allen Historian Memorial Collection*, George Shivers, ed. (2022), 248-249. ^d Casey Parsons, "Buddy's Garage," Talk with Douglas Nichols, 22 May 2003, transcript in archival files of the Allen Historical Society, CA2. ^e Cooper, *Allen, Maryland: 1702 -1981* (Unpublished, 1981), 26-27. ^f Lake, Griffing and Stevenson. *Atlas of Wicomico, Somerset*, 15; Florence-Byrd Cooper, *Allen, Maryland*, 15; "Store Fire", *Salisbury Advertiser*, 22 April 1893, n.p. ^g Casey Parsons, 1971, n.p. ^h "Allen Houses: Whayland Store," *Allen Historian* 3, no.2 (1997), 5; *Allen Historian*, 12, no. 2 (August, 2006). ⁱ Kolb, Jr., "Memoires," n.p.; ^j Shivers, "Commerce in the Village of Allen During to 18th Through the 20th Centuries," *Allen Historian* 27, no. 2 (2022), 2-8. ^k Shivers, *Changing Times*, 133. ^l ^m Althea Chandler interview by author, 2 May 2024.

Processing and Services

Adams Mills

One of the first non-agricultural businesses mentioned in the records was the Adams Mill. It was tied to agriculture as the first mill was a grist mill (see Figure 1b, A) that ground grain into corn meal and flour. It was originally built by Willam Brereton, Jr. in 1702. John, William, and Andrew Adams sons of Reverend Alexander Adams who immigrated from England acquired the mill from Brereton around 1769, the year they bought the property of ten acres on each side of the Passerdyke Creek. They built a trap or small dam that was used to provide water power to the mill (see Figure 2). The water power turned a turbine which rotated the top stone as the bottom stone was stationary. There was a groove in the bottom stone which funneled the corn meal or flour to a conveyor and then into a bag. When John died in 1798, Andrew took over running the grist mill. In 1818 Andrew's grandson George Dashiell took over the mill; his son James sold it to three men Winder, Disharoon, and Twilley in 1856. In the late nineteenth century the miller was a William Turner who ran it for the mill's owner Benjamin F. Messick. In 1886 the mill was sold to Samuel Graham who later sold it to Woodland Wallace. Beverly Hitch was the last owner of the mill (1904-1919). Hitch attached an engine house to the southside of the mill to provide auxiliary power when the water was low. At the time Hitch was a part time miller and a full time post master. In 1918 the dam was washed out by a storm. The mill was torn down in 1919 to make way for a new bridge and road over the mill pond. Some of the lumber and stones were used in building homes and another business in the area as we shall see.

Figure 2. Adams Grist Mill



Source: Adams Mill File, Allen Museum Archives, Drawer CA2, File H201A, Folder 02.

Property descriptions also note a saw mill with two log houses on each side. At one time the saw mill used a vertical saw to cut sills used in house construction. Later in the nineteenth century, it produced wooden baskets for the growing strawberry business in the region. The early records of the mill also mention a store, a tavern, and a blacksmith shop nearby. The Adams's are believed to have had a hand in all but the blacksmith shop. At the end of the 19th century the grist and saw mill properties had been separated. In 1882 Isaac Jones sold the saw mill to B.F. Messick and a William W. Disharoon. The latter bought out his partner a couple of months later; he then sold it to Wilson Todd in 1886. Todd later sold the saw mill to the Messick family who operated

a tomato canning factory there that closed by 1926. It was the last business to operate on the premises.¹⁷

Collins Wharf

Being close to navigable waters with the creeks off the Wicomico River, Allen developed a “port” of sorts at Collins Wharf. Starting in 1830 steamboats joined the sailing vessels that plied the waters of the Eastern Shore providing transportation for goods and people. By 1930 it was all gone as water transport was replaced with trains and trucks.¹⁸ The landing in the Allen area was at Collins Wharf on the Wicomico River just upriver from where the Wicomico Creek enters the river

(See Figure 1a, A). It could be reached by what is now Yacht Club Road which intersects with Collins Wharf Road. James and Susan Collins bought the land along the river in 1857, but did not start the wharf until a few years later. The activity at the wharf no doubt was a factor for the Whayland’s locating their general store at the corner of Wharf Road and the county road in 1877. Collins Wharf also boasted a post office, and one of the Collins’s sons Lamartine was listed as postmaster there in 1888. By 1882 steamboat service began at the wharf for both passengers and goods. In that same year the Collins invested heavily in the Maryland Steamboat Company after selling the wharf to them as well as land on the southside of the river to be used as a public landing. The Collins also conveyed a right of way from the county road to the wharf. The Collins were

¹⁷ Florence-Byrd Cooper, ed. *Allen, Maryland: 1702 -1981* (Unpublished, 1981), 16-17. “The Adams Family,” *Allen Historian* 20, no. 1 (2014), 4, 6; George Shivers, “The Allen Mill,” *Allen Historian* 2, no 3 (1995), 4-5. Material on the Hitches and lumber mill: Casey Parsons, “Thorton Hitch’s Reflections,” *Allen Historian* 6, no. 2 (2000), 3-4; George Shivers, “Oral History Interview by author; “Mr. Douglas Nichols Part II,” *Allen Historian* 8, no. 1 (2002), 9; Shivers, George R. Interview by author, 17 April 2024. Tape Recording in Digital Archives of the Allen Historical Society. Material on saw mill from Shivers, *Changing Times*, 126-127.

¹⁸ Charles J. Truitt, *Historic Salisbury Updated: 1662 – 1982* (Salisbury, MD: Historic Books, Inc., 1982), 80.

forced into bankruptcy due to overinvestment in the steamboat company and had to sell their adjoining farm. James died shortly thereafter.¹⁹ Despite these problems, the wharf continued to operate and serve the transportation needs of the area. For example, the *Virginia* a steamboat out of Baltimore would cross the bay stop at Hooper's Island, Wingate Point, Deals Island and sail up the Wicomico River to Salisbury stopping at the wharf on its way. Collins Wharf served as a landing for the Baltimore, Chesapeake & Atlantic Rail Road Co. beginning in 1912, therefore, adapting to changing transport modes as it could. Mary Lee Kolb (Peninsula Farm Market) remembered taking the steamboat from the wharf to travel to Salisbury and elsewhere. In 1920 the Moore family purchased the land on which the wharf was located and started farming there. By the end of the decade, the wharf no longer functioned as trucks and trains replaced water transport in the region.²⁰

W. F. Messick & Bros. Cannery

In the post-Civil War era farmers in Wicomico and Somerset Counties shifted from grains to produce. As canning technology improved, it became advantageous to move canneries closer to the crops to ensure they were packed while still fresh. According to Wennerstein, tomato canneries started in Somerset County around 1895. By 1929 there were 60 canneries in the county, 20 were dedicated solely to tomatoes. Harry Messick son of Benjamin F. Messick opened his tomato cannery in 1899 on the lot once owned by his father and that had been the site of the former saw mill on 'trap' pond in Allen (see Figure 1b, B). The location on the pond permitted steamboats to

¹⁹ George Shivers, "Collins Wharf and the Community of Trinity," *Allen Historian* 12, no. 2 (August 2006), 3-6; George R. Shivers, *The Allen Historian Memorial Collection, 2006 – 2021* (Allen, MD: Allen Historical Society, 2022), 142.

²⁰ George Shivers, "Steamboats on the Wicomico River." *Allen Historian* 19, no.2 (2013), 5; *Allen Historian* 6, no. 2 (1999), 9.

come up to the factory to pick up the canned tomatoes and ship them to markets across the bay. The boats had to wait for the tides to be up to get in and out of the creek. Workers received 3 cents a basket for picking tomatoes. They were paid in tokens by the cannery which they could turn into cash or use to buy items in the local grocery or general stores. Once picked, the tomatoes were brought to the cannery by horse and wagon and later trucks. The tomatoes were dumped into oblong baskets which passed through a steam chamber for easier peeling. Workers sat along benches at a trough like table sloped to enable both the juice and the peels to run off and be deposited outside the building as they peeled tomatoes. Farmers would come by and pick up the peels to feed to their hogs. The peeled tomatoes would be placed in metal cans and cooked in boiling water. The cans were then sealed and set aside to cool and then were packed into crates for shipment. During the packing season, the watermen nearby would work in the cannery as their season was in the colder months. The Messick Cannery had a reputation for canning high grade tomatoes. In December, 1920 the cannery was destroyed by fire. It was not occupied at the time because it was closed for the season after the tomato harvest had been processed. The fire destroyed the building and 19,000 cases of canned tomatoes. The loss amounted to \$50,000, yet it had been insured for only \$38,000. Although Messick planned to rebuild for the next canning season, he never did. The cannery was the last business to operate on that side of the pond.²¹

²¹ John R. Wennerstein, *Maryland's Eastern Shore: A Journey in Time and Place* (Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1991), 104; George R. Shivers, "Commerce in the Village of Allen During the 18th through the 20th Centuries," *Allen Historian* 27, no. 2 (2022), 2-8. Shivers Interview by author, 17 April 2024; "Large Canning House Destroyed by Fire," *Wicomico County News* (9 December 1920), n.p.

Payne Marina

Prior to operating a marina, Luther and Mary Payne were successful farmers. They were considered among the major farmers in the area between the 1945-70 according to local historian George Shivers. Their farm bordered the Wicomico Creek. In the 1950s they decided to open a marina given their location on the water. Doris Payne Fretz, their daughter indicated that her parents were probably destined to open a marina as the family owned 52-foot boat that they took out regularly. The boat slept 8 and had two heads. It also had a coal furnace so they could take it out year around. Another factor that may have persuaded the Paynes to open a marina besides their water front was that Chris Craft the manufacturer of large luxury motor boats had built a factory in Salisbury in 1934. In an effort for both Chris Craft and the marina to increase their business, the Paynes received a franchise from Chris Craft to sell and service their boats. Luther and Mary sold everything from 54-foot yachts to 14-15 foot boats. The latter were sold in kits which either the buyer could assemble or pay the Paynes to assemble it for them. The Paynes also hired a goldsmith from Salisbury named Casper who applied goldleaf names and the home port of the boat on its stern. The Paynes boat the "Acorn" was one of the first to have such an adornment. The marina office was located across the road from the marina itself. Luther was in charge of sales and service while Mary, with the help of her older daughter Peggy, took care of office management and keeping the company books. Mary, however, was often called to the marina to help set the mooring lines; she was considered the best at that task. Young Doris was in high school so on weekends, she would help wash the boats and pump gas for which she was paid. Beside the immediate family members, Doris's boyfriend, later husband Gary, helped out. One time he helped others to get a 54 foot yacht in the marina ; on another occasion he assisted in cutting a hole to

install a bilge pump. It appears that, if you were around the marina, you were put to work. The Paynes attended boat shows in Salisbury and Virginia to promote their marina and Chris Craft as well as to keep up with new developments in boating. Doris and her sister helped man the booth at the shows. Doris once accompanied her parents to Chris Craft's headquarters for a dealer conference. Luther also started the Power Squadron in Salisbury; it was an organization that promoted powerboating in the area. Luther and Mary remained in the business until they retired in 1954. They sold it the Katskis who later sold the marina to a man from Baltimore. Eventually, Stuart Wikander bought the marina in 1980, and it still operates under his name today. The business is focused on renting slips, boat storage, and some maintenance and mechanical work.²²

Agribusiness

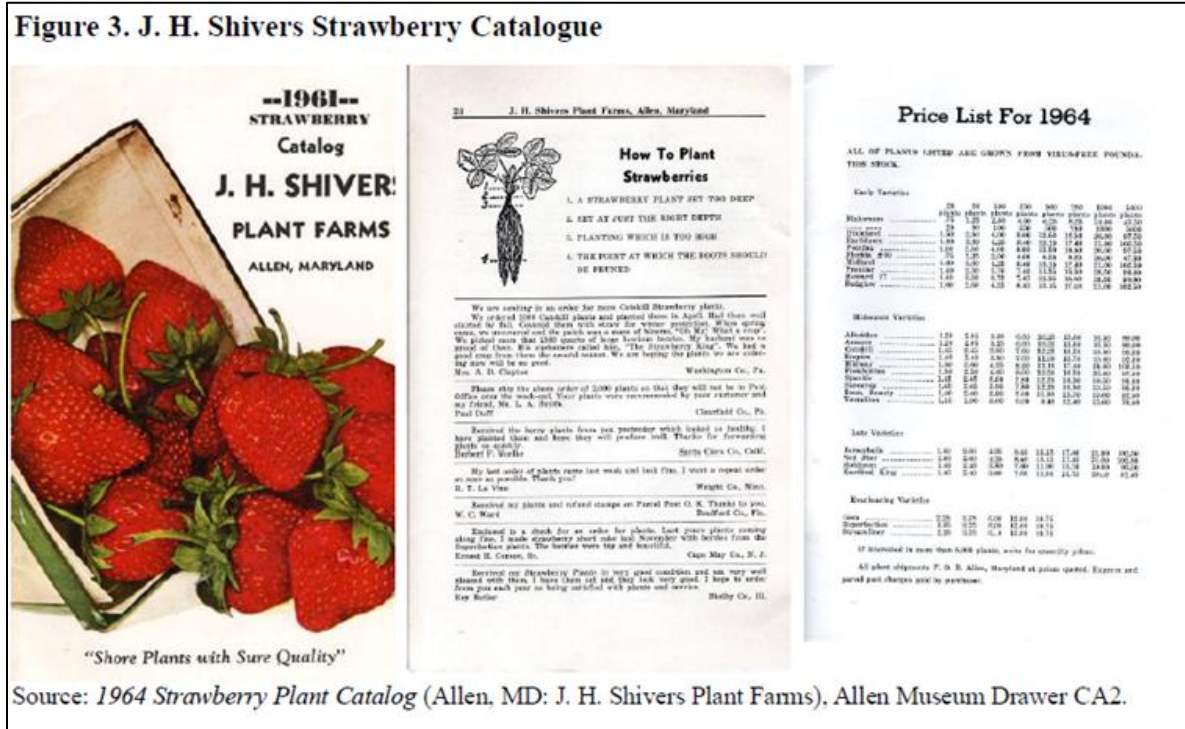
Since the beginning of European settlement in the region, agriculture has been one of the dominant foundations of the local economy. Earlier it was noted that the farmers in the region adapted to changes in markets and farming practices. Initially they moved away from the fluctuating tobacco markets and switched to grains. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries farmers moved into produce such as tomatoes, beans (string and lima beans), cucumbers, strawberries, and peaches. An outcome of this was the establishment of the produce auction block by Jesse Pollitt in the 1930s. Pollitt earned a penny a package for everything sold on the block. During its peak,

²² Shivers, *Changing Times*, 160, 163; Richard W. Cooper, *Portrait of Salisbury Maryland Thru the 1900s* (Baltimore, MD: Gateway press, 1994), 57 (about Chris Craft); Fretz Interviews by Author 29 April 2024; Cooper, *Allen, Maryland*, 22.

10,000-12,000 bushels of string beans were sold daily. The University of Maryland declared the Allen produce block the string bean capital of the world. By the 1950s the block was closed after the formation of a cooperative produce markets between Salisbury and Princess Anne.²³

In the twentieth century two factors influenced farmers to turn to grains such as corn and soybeans. One was the growth of chicken processing that used the grains to fatten the chickens. A second factor was the scarcity of skilled farm hands to plant and harvest produce. Grains could be farmed by mechanized machines. More recently, farmers in the region have shown the ability to adapt to changes in demand and tastes. Below microhistories of three businesses are presented that found a new niche in the market to produce crops providing higher value added for the farmer: strawberry plants, a vineyard, and a sod farm.

²³ David W. Kolb, Jr., "Memoirs," (2000), n.p.; Wayne Noble, "Allen was Once Nation's Top String Bean Market," *Salisbury Daily Times*, 31 December 1977, n.p.



Source: 1964 Strawberry Plant Catalog (Allen, MD: J. H. Shivers Plant Farms), Allen Museum Drawer CA2.

While strawberries were a popular produce in themselves, farmers in the area also began to grow and sell strawberry plants to farmers around the country and internationally. The early movers were both men from Allen. W. F. Allen of the village's namesake family started his operation in 1885 when he released his first plant catalogue. His business was run out of Salisbury although he grew some of his plants in his Allen fields. John Jones of Allen also started his strawberry plant farm in the late 19th century. A local farmer J. H. Shivers worked for Jones in 1926, and in 1933 he bought the plant operation from Jones. Shivers came from a successful farming family. He owned or rented 700 acres in the Allen area for his operation. A 1964 Plant catalogue (See Figure 3) revealed that Shivers offered eight early season plant varieties (e.g., Earlydawn, Dixieland, Redglow, etc.), ten mid-season varieties (e.g., Catskill, Pocahontas, Empire, etc.), and four late varieties (Jerseybelle, Robinson, & Red Star) as well as three everbearing varieties (Gem,

Superfection, & Streamliner). The brochure offered tips for planting, how, and when to order as well as a pricelist and an order form. The plants could be bought in lots as small as 25 to as large as 5000. An examination of a catalogue from W. F. Allen reveals a similar variety of plants, instructions, etc. J. H. Shivers was a family operation as Jay's wife Rose and later his daughters Jayne and Betty were participants in the operation. Jay loved farming so he took care of that aspect of the business. For example, he had an arrangement with an African American in a nearby village to recruit workers during the planting and harvesting season, and Jay provided the truck to bring them to the farm. Rose had good business acumen and took care of the books and often dealt with customers. Jayne was the most active of his daughters in the business. Shivers sold plants nationwide and to some international customers as well. The Shivers also grew beans, cucumbers, and melons. The Shivers exited the strawberry plant business in the late sixties.²⁴

²⁴ Cooper, Allen, Maryland, 26-27 (W.F. Allen); Shivers interview by Author, 17 April 2024; *1964 Strawberry Plant Catalog* (Allen, MD: J. H. Shivers Plant Farms), *Allen's 81st Book of Berries: 1885 to 1966* (Salisbury, MD: W. F. Allen Co., 1966); both catalogues are in Allen Museum Drawer CA2.

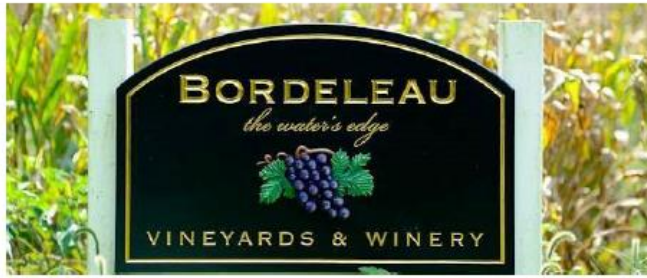
Bordeleau Vineyards

From the 1970s onwards, Americans had discovered that wine was a good beverage any time and did not require a special occasion. Given the new demand, wineries spread from the traditional regions of California, Washington, and New York to many other states including Maryland by the end of the 20th century. Maryland's oldest winery, Boordy Vineyards in Baltimore County started before this trend.²⁵ A later entrant was Bordeleau Vineyards on the Wicomico Creek in Allen, MD. Its founder Tom Shelton was a former operations manager with Perdue Farms. He later left Perdue and bought his own chicken processing plant in the Midwest, but continued to maintain a home on the Eastern Shore. Tom had been interested in wine as a teenager when he made fruit wines. He turned his avocation into a business in 1999. He bought a farm in Allen in 1998 and planted his first grapes a year later (see Figure 4). His early grapes were whites such as Chardonnay and Vidal Blanc and one red Chambourcin. Each year until 2003, Tom added more grapes including two reds Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc as well as a Sauvignon Blanc. At this point Tom had to make a strategic decision of whether to develop his winery into a commercial winery that would allow him to produce a lot more wines, but he would also come under more federal and state alcoholic beverage regulations. The key issue was whether he and his team believed the weather and the soils of the area would consistently produce good wines. With much deliberation, they decided to go ahead and sought the license in 2006. As a result, Tom added 8.5 acres of vines from 2007-2011 that included more grape varieties including: Malbec, Pinot Grigio, and Muscat.²⁶

²⁵ Full disclosure, the Defords owners of Boordy vineyards are cousins of the author.

²⁶ Wine Enthusiast, "Maryland's Wine Regions on the Rise." <https://www.wineenthusiast.com/culture/wine/marylands-wine-regions-on-the-rise/> (accessed 3 May 2024). ; Bordeleau Vineyards <https://www.bordeleauwine.com/> (accessed 4 April 2024).

Figure 4. Bordeleau Vineyards



Source: <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-&q=bordeleau+vineyards+%26+winery#ip=1&lpg=cid:CgIgAQ%3D%3D,ik:CAoSLEFGMVFPcFBScmM4MmNramUyd0licEg3Smc0M3pHYU15SWpEUVBfVkkx0SGJz> (accessed 4 May 2024).

Bordeleau produced both white and red wines that are processed differently. White grapes were pressed with their stems on after cooling and were then placed in stainless steel tanks for fermentation and aging. Red wine grapes were destemmed and dropped into bins for fermentation. After two weeks the wine was pressed to separate the skin and seeds. The juice was then placed in aged oak barrels for about 3 years. Like many wineries, Bordeleau offered tours of the vineyards and the processing plant. The tour ended with a visit to the tasting room. The wine business today was not just about making good wines, but also about selling an experience and agro tourism. Customers who bought bottles from the winery were automatically enrolled in Bordeleau's loyalty program. This provided customers discounts on future purchases. The vineyard also had a wine club that included invitations to tastings, special events, and discounts on wine purchases. It was all about tying the customer to the winery. Shelton built facilities on site that permitted holding larger events such as weddings, fourth of July celebrations, and fund raisers for the arts, Habitat for Humanity, or other worthy causes. In 2009 Bordeleau joined the Chesapeake Wine Trail with six other wineries sponsored by the Maryland Wineries Association. This provided agro tourists with a packaged tour on the Eastern Shore. Such tours helped promote the region, the industry,

and the individual wineries. Bordeleau received numerous awards from recognition for individual wines such as best in show for its Pinot Grigio in Maryland by the Maryland Winemasters to being named as one of the top ten wineries in Maryland by *Wine Enthusiast*. Despite these recognitions, Tom and his team knew they had to consistently produce good quality wines and devise ways to keep customers coming back for more with innovative programs and events.²⁷

²⁷ Bordeleau Vineyards. <https://www.bordeleauwine.com/> (accessed 4 April 2024); Tracy Sahler, “Bordeleau Winery Serves up Fourth of July Open House,” *The Daily Times* (Salisbury, MD), 2 July 2008, B5; Josh Davis, “Enjoy a Night Out at the Bordeleau Vineyards & Winery,” *Go Magazine*, 29 September 2011, 10, 12; Katie Crowe, “Vineyard wins Best in Show,” *The Daily Times* (Salisbury, MD) 29 July 2009, A13; ³⁶ Collins Wharf Sod (<https://www.collinswharfsod.com/about>). (accessed 24 April 2024).

Figure 5. Collins Wharf Sod Farm



Source: Collins Wharf Sod (<https://www.collinswharfsod.com/about>.
(accessed 24 April 2024).

In the same year (1999) that Bordeleau winery was established, the Moore family expanded their farming operations into sod farming. They produced sod for sale for both residential and commercial customers. The Moores were taking advantage of America's love affair with beautiful lawns. The Moore farm started in 1921 when Arlington and Olive purchased a small farm near the old Collins Wharf along the Wicomico River. During the Depression, they kept the farm afloat by raising and selling vegetables, eggs, chickens, and butter. The farm expanded in 1946 when Fred Moore, Sr. joined the farm and added 200 acres. During the 1960s, the farm grew to 800 acres with the help of Fred's spouse Connie and sons Fred, Jr. and Scott. In the 1970s the farm grew to

1800 acres when Fred Sr. and Fred Jr formed a partnership. The sod operation started with 66 acres devoted to fescue, bluegrass and bentgrass; the remaining acreage was still devoted to grains and vegetables (see Figure 5). Today, the Collins Wharf farm has over 600 acres devoted to various type of grasses. It has proven to be a profitable enterprise for Fred, Jr. and his son Eddie.³⁶

Retail and Commerce

In addition to farming the most ubiquitous type of business mentioned over the years in Allen were stores offering a variety of products and services to the village and its environs. According to one historian, year-round stores appeared in the Chesapeake region in the mid 1700s and grew rapidly through the century and beyond.²⁸ Of the many stores, the three profiled below include: George Phillips Store, Peninsula Farm Market, and Ray's Place.

George Phillips Store

George M. Phillips operated a farm until the death of his daughter Hester; he also suffered from rheumatism so he decided to quit farming. In 1900 George and Emma Phillips built a store on Allen Road on the site of the old J & W Allen store that had burned down in 1893. They operated it until his death in 1933. George included a wing to house his family and later added to it to provide a larger home. The store sold the usual general merchandise as well as chicken feed, gasoline (see Figure 6), and molasses poured into jars with a crank handle. Lillian Malone remembered driving to the store in a horse and buggy for groceries. One of the men who hung around the store would come over Lillian's house and hitch the horse to the buggy. Once in the store, Mr. Phillips would bring each item recording the cost mentally. When the list was completed, he gave Mrs. Malone the amount owed instantly without writing anything down. George Phillips had had little formal education, but he had a good head for figures. He usually kept accounts on

²⁸ Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680 – 1800* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986) 225.

scraps of brown paper with no names, but he always remembered which account belonged to which customer. Customers would often trade eggs or produce for groceries when cash was tight.

Figure 6. Phillips Store – Gassing Up



Source: Phillips Family File, Allen Museum Archives, Drawer CA1, File H112A Folder F08.

The store became a favorite gathering place for socializing. In the evenings men came to the store to read newspapers, played checkers, and swapped stories. The women would meet in the Phillips's living room next door to exchange news. When field hands came to the store for lunch, they would take it out on the porch to dine and talk. George's daughter Lillian Phillips and her sister Pauline helped out in the store from the time when they were young. Lillian cleaned oil lamps and spittoons the men had used in the evening. The two sisters also helped during picking season. Trucks brought pickers in as early as 4 AM so the children kept slippers and housecoats

nearby. As soon as they heard the trucks, they rushed next door to the store. At that time everyone wanted to be waited on at the same time; it was chaotic, and it was hard to remember who ordered what. These experiences served Lillian well as she took over the store upon her father's death and ran it until 1946. According to her son, Lillian was very energetic and a good saleswoman and well organized. She hired a couple of people to help in the store and someone to help with the cleaning and cooking at home. The Elliotts bought the store from Lillian and ran it until the mid 1950s when it was sold to a Mrs. Desmond who converted the building into apartments. Today the building is a single-family home next to the Allen Museum.³⁸

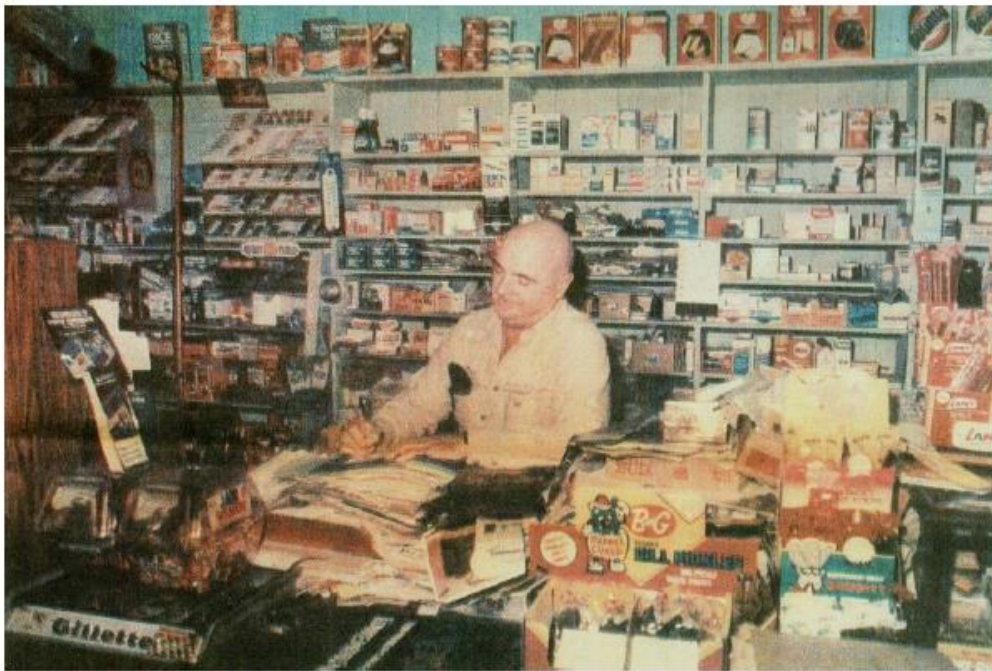
Peninsula Farm Market

Allen's longest operating market was built by Jesse Pollitt in 1926 next to his produce auction block. The location was near a store Pollitt had built in 1915 which was later bought by O. O. Banks who ran a store there until 1965 (See Table 1). The Farm Market was also known as the Kolb store and the Allen store. Pollitt originally leased the store to Raleigh Cathell who invested in quality equipment for the store including a meat case, scales, slicers, etc. When Cathell was called up for the Korean War in 1950, he turned the store over to David Kolb, Sr., his son-in-law, and his wife Mary Lee. Kolb. The Kolbs renamed it the Peninsula Farm Market. David "Butch" Kolb, Jr took over after his father passed away; he was a college graduate and had worked in insurance and real estate before taking over the store (See Figure 7). According to David "Butch" Kolb, Jr. "Memoires", it was called the little store of wonders: "You wonder if we have it, we

³⁸ A Moment in time," *Salisbury Daily Times*, (December 14, 1997), n.p.; Pauline Phillips Best, "The Phillips Sisters Grow Up," *Allen Historian* 4, no. 2 (1998), 2-8; Pauline Phillips Best, "The Phillips Sisters Grow Up, Part III," *Allen Historian* 5, no. 2 (1999) 12; Casey Parsons, Reminiscences," *Allen Historian* 3, no. 4 (1997), 5; Louise Figgs, "Reminiscences of the Phillips Store, in *Allen Historian: A Memorial Selection, 2006 – 2021*, ed. George R. Shivers, (Allen, MD: Allen Historical Society, 2022), 157; George R. Shivers Interview by author 17 April 2024.

wonder where it is, and everybody wonders how we find it.”²⁹ There was little organization and very many products including: canned goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, sporting goods, auto supplies, patent medicines, cigarettes (74 brands), comic books, candy, and even fresh-made sandwiches At one point the store had 149 soft drinks and also sold Carhartt clothing, shoes, gasoline, etc. During the 1990s Butch often bought milk and other items at grocery stores in Salisbury because it cheaper than what his suppliers offered.³⁰

Figure 7. Peninsula Farm Market. David “Butch” Kolb at the Counter



Source: David Butch Kolb File, Allen Museum Archives, Drawer CA1 File/folder 109A.F11.

²⁹ David W. Kolb, Jr. “*Memoires*,” (Unpublished, 2000), n.p.; Kolb’s great grandfather Caleb Twilley had a store in Allen in 1848 a few hundred feet from the present store.

³⁰ Brice Stump, “Allen Country Store is Still Alive and Well,” *The Daily Times* (Salisbury), 19 June 1989, 1-2.

Usually, David Sr. was at the butcher counter while Mary Lee took charge of the main counter; she was also in charge of the bookkeeping for the store. Agnes Kolb Culp, Butch's sister also worked at the store; early on she served as store detective. If she felt someone was trying to shoplift, she would give her mother Mary Lee a "look," and Mary Lee would go and ask the customer if they "needed help". In high school and college Agnes worked the candy counter and the soda fountain. Among other people, who worked at the store were Lillian Shivers who had run the Phillips Store, and later her son George worked there after college while he was still deciding what to do with his life.³¹

Peninsula was a full-service store. Besides finding items for customers, the Kolbs provided other services. Butch Kolb and his father would deliver goods for people who mailed their lists to them. Butch provided this service to shut-ins or the elderly into the 1990s. Rosa Wiley received full service for twenty years. The Kolbs would pick her up at home bring her to the store where she sat and talked while they filled her shopping list and then took her home. More formal services included auto service such as oil changes, tune ups, and gasoline; the store had a mechanic on duty.

Later the store offered hunting and fishing licenses, Mrs. Kolb provided notary services, and in 1980 the post office moved next door to the store with Mary Lee as post mistress. People would pick up their mail and pop into the store to pick up a few items or have lunch.³²

³¹ ; Kolb, Jr., "*Memoires*," n.p. ; Agnes Kolb Culp Interview by author 18 April 2024; Shivers, *The Allen Historian Memorial Collection*, 151-154

³² Stump, "Allen Country Store," 1-2; Kolb, Jr. "*Memoires*," n.p.

During the 1950s -1960s an additional 3,000 migrant workers came to the Allen area from the south to plant and harvest produce. This proved to be a boost for the local stores as noted earlier. The laborers lived in work camps outside of town and were trucked in by crew chiefs for their shopping. The Kolbs and other store owners extended their hours during the season from 7AM- 7 PM to 4:30 AM – 11 PM to accommodate the demand. The fountain was installed to support meals for the migrants. In the early morning the crew chiefs came and bought ice, sodas, bread, and lunch meat to feed the workers before going out in the field. Around 9 AM the trucks brought the migrants in to buy breakfast and fixings for their lunch. These men were poorly educated so it took some ingenuity to figure out their orders. For example, one man asked for three wishes; what he wanted was soaps for three washes: clothes, dishes, and personal. Another asked for chicken feet, dog feet, and hogs feet, translation: drumsticks, dog food, and pickled pigs feet. After work, the trucks brought the migrants back to buy meat, vegetables, and utensils to make dinners. They had no refrigeration so they had to buy their food daily. The crew chiefs were given a store discount for bringing workers to the store.³³

Peninsula Farm Market was the social mecca of Allen just as the Phillips, Banks, and J & W Allen stores had been previously. Both David and his son Butch were good story tellers as was old Jesse Pollitt. The latter would often come to the store after he retired simply to tell stories to whoever was there. George Shivers remembers David, Sr. was a barrel of laughs. Agnes Kolb Culp remembered that, “A lot of people came to talk and have a coca cola then buy a loaf of bread.” It was a gathering place. Both David Sr. and Jr. liked to share stories and conversations with whoever was there. When Agnes’s future husband John came over from Washington, DC, he was surprised

³³ Kolb, Jr. “*Memoires*,” n.p.; Culp, interview 18 April 2024.

that no one greeted customers as they came in the door. The first time he was there, he tried to act as greeter but was rebuffed. He was told by the Kolbs that people came in to first listen to the conversation and then go about their shopping. For young people like George Shivers as a boy, catching up on the comics in the book section or going to buy a piece of candy was a fun activity at the store. According to George, the Peninsula Farm Market and the post office were the most integrated places in the village. “Almost everyone, both African Americans and Whites, stopped there each week... .”³⁴

Although local store owners were friendly with each other, customers were fiercely loyal and would not set foot in the store of a competitor. This was also true for the migrants. Given the strong customer loyalty, it was easier for competitors to work with each other. For example, the Kolbs often borrowed out of stock items from the Banks store nearby and vice versa. When David Kolb Senior died, Agnes’s cousin Melissa Bright took over, and Butch worked part time due to failing health. It was a convenience store by then. In the end the store could not compete with the selection and prices of larger chains like Walmart, and it closed in 2000. Today, not a day goes by when someone asks the Kolb descendants, when are you going to reopen the store again? ³⁵

Ray’s Place

Beginning in the 1830s, free blacks settled along Upper Ferry Road. During the twentieth century, a number of black-owned businesses operated along this stretch of road. They served the local African American population during the period of segregation. One such business was Ray’s Place founded by Ray and Celestine Church in 1957. They decided to open a business to better serve the

³⁴ Shivers, *The Allen Historian Memorial Collection*, 151-154 (quote, 153); Culp interview 18 April 2024.

³⁵ Culp Interview 18 April 2024; Kolb, Jr. “*Memoires*,” n.p.

black community, neither had had prior business experience. The Churches built a combination store and beer garden on the front of their property as their residence was set back from the road. The Church's store sold mostly dry goods during the week, and they ran the beer garden on weekends by offering music (jukebox), dancing, and beer. The Churches later added a kitchen to serve food at the beer garden but also to sell sandwiches from the store. The kitchen also permitted them to have fund raiser dinners of fried chicken, oysters, or muskrat, whatever was in season. They put out fliers and that was the primary event at the beer garden on a particular weekend. These events helped to increase the family's income. Celestine ran the store during the week as Ray had a job at a saw mill. They both ran the beer garden on the weekends. Celestine did all the cooking, kept the place clean, handled stock: orders, deliveries, etc. Daughter Althea and her two sisters were young, but they did help clean up after the weekends and helped set up for the special dinners their parents put on occasionally. Ray ran the beer garden, and he kept a shot gun behind the counter. As a short man this was his insurance that the peace would be kept during the festivities; everyone knew it was there. The Churches added a one room barbershop and rented it to Shorty a cousin of Celestines so the men had a convenient place to get haircuts.

Ray was involved in politics mostly encouraging the black community to vote. He held sessions to show people how to use the ballots. Prior to elections, Ray would drive his pickup truck with billboards about upcoming elections through the black neighborhoods. Ray was clever in how he handled the election effort. He was a registered republican because that party paid better for his services in getting out the vote, but Ray always voted for democrats and told his audience to vote their conscience. Ray's Place was the main source of family income for about 10 years³⁶.

³⁶ Shivers, *Changing Times*, 73; Interview with Althea Chandler by the author 2 May 2024.

When the Churches closed the business in the late sixties, they used the building for storage, and it was later taken down in the 1980s.

Discussion and Conclusions

A longitudinal look at business activity in a region permits one to see the development of different types of businesses, the clustering of businesses near each other, and to see how entrepreneurs sought new opportunities based on new technologies and new markets. Moreover, business often contributed not only to the local economy but also to the social and cultural aspects of the region. Table 1 reveals the development of various businesses in three broad sectors over three centuries (27 businesses). However, due to available data, most businesses profiled were developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the first sector businesses used the natural resource of water available to power grist mills and saw mills. Access to navigable waters made Collins Wharf a viable transportation hub. The cannery took advantage of water access to ship its product to distant markets. The Payne Marina took advantage of water access to provide boats with slips and repairs mostly for the growing recreational boat market. The development in agriculture spanned all three centuries going from tobacco to grains, to produce, to plants, vineyards, and even sod. The oldest sector also seems to be one of the most adaptable over time. Commerce in the form of stores began in the area in the seventeenth century although the majority were founded in the 19th and 20th centuries. The stores carried items and offered services that reflected the times. For example, the Peninsula Farm Market sold gas and provided a mechanic to work on cars in the 20th century others catered to an underserved population like Ray's Place.

There is evidence that stores would cluster together in geographic proximity to one another. This was presumably because if one business attracted customers, others selling different goods and

services might attract the same customers. The early history of Trap Pond seems to reveal this. Besides the two Mills, maps and documents revealed that there was a store for merchandise, a blacksmith shop, and a tavern in the area. The Whayland store opened near Collins Wharf to access its passengers. One might even consider the produce auction block in the middle of town as an effort to provide a centrally located market to bring farmers from out of town together with the stores and customers in town. Stores were located near each other such as the Peninsula Farm Market and O.O. Banks providing a concentration of options for customers in the same location. Some businesses were located on the site of previous businesses, such as: the Messick Cannery near the site of the saw mill, the sod farm on the site of Collins Wharf, Phillips store on the site of the J. W. Allen Store; O. O. Banks on site of a Pollitt store built in 1915, and the Farm Market a few hundred feet from Twilley's (circa 1848) store. This fact suggests that the sites were good location for businesses through the ages. It also may have helped play to people's habits of shopping in same location.

New opportunities based on new technologies and market opportunities were also reflected in the Allen businesses profiled. Some businesses took advantage of new technologies of the time such as the Messick Cannery. Improvements in canning technology permitted operations on a smaller scale closer to the source of fruits and vegetables.³⁷ Improvements in gasoline engines for boats provided an opportunity for Payne Marina to sell and service such craft. Moreover, the fact that the manufacturer of Chris Craft had a factory in Salisbury made it possible for a small marina in Allen to receive a franchise. New opportunities are seen in the emergence of Bordeleau Vineyards

³⁷ See for example; R. Lee Burton, Jr. *Canneries of the Eastern Shore* (Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1986), Ch. 1.

which took advantage of Americans' growing interest in wine and the growth of agro tourism on Delmarva. The Moore's switching part of their farm fields to sod took advantage of the growing suburbanization of nearby towns like Salisbury with residences having larger lawns as well as the growth of vacation homes on the shore. Even the stores revealed keeping up with new technology and trends by selling gasoline in the 20th century such as the Phillips Store, and Peninsula Farm Market, and O.O. Banks store as well as the emergence of Buddy's and Somerset Garages to service automobiles exclusively.

Many businesses of Allen contributed to the social and cultural experiences of its citizens and beyond. For example, store owners Jesse Pollitt, O. O. Banks, and David Kolb and son were all good story tellers and had a ready-made audience in their customers which they took advantage of during the days and on many evenings where people would just come to listen to their stories and for the conversation. The second floor of J. & W. Allen store (see Table 1) held dances of the Allen Cotillon Club and meetings of other civic organizations. Bordeleau Vineyards's social role reflects the changes in the region and the mores of the time. The vineyard provides a venue for events such as weddings and charity fund raisers. It also is part of the regional wine tour introducing people who are not from the area to the region and its culture. In a sense the winery reflects a social role well beyond the Allen area to include the surrounding counties and regions beyond. Although not as personal, it is still an important contribution to the socio-cultural environment of the region.³⁸

³⁸ "Store Fire," *Salisbury Advertiser*, 22 April 1893, n.p.; Crowe, "Vineyard wins Best in Show," *The Daily Times*, A13.

The profiles of the local businesses also humanizes the study of business history as most of these businesses were owned and run by families, and they employed local community members. Many Allen businesses provided opportunities for all family members including women and children to participate. Among the women who contributed significantly in their family's business included Mary Payne who was the office manager of the marina. Lillian Shivers ran the Phillips Store after her father's death. Mary Lee Kolb ran the main counter and did the books for the Farm Market. Celestine Church ran the Ray's Place store during the week as well as helped Ray with the beer garden on weekends. She also managed inventory, ordering, and billing for the company. The children of these and other families also contributed to the businesses. Doris Fretz helped her parents at the marina by washing boats and pumping gas. Lillian Shivers had served in a variety of capacities since she was a small child before she took over her father's store. Agnes Kolb Culp and her brother served at the counters in the Peninsula Farm Market with her parents. George Shivers worked at the store after college while deciding what to do with his life. Althea Chandler and her sister helped her parents out by cleaning and helping prep for events at Ray's Place. Rose Shivers was a partner in every way to Jay in their strawberry plant farm business. Connie and sons Fred, Jr. and Scott and later grandson Eddie helped Fred Moore, Sr. with running the farm and its expansion into the sod business. These all reflect the important roles both the spouses and the children played in the running of the businesses. For the wives, it expanded their roles beyond the household and provided them a sense of accomplishment in another realm. The children undoubtedly learned important skills and traits of employees such as dependability and perseverance even when the work was unpleasant or tedious. These experiences surely helped prepare them for their future work roles. The examples above reveal that business institutions

contribute much more to a region than simply economic benefit. There are also social and cultural benefits to the community as well as to the business owners and their families.

This study of a few local businesses in Allen, MD over the centuries reveals a complex relationship of people and community. One question that seemed to be aptly answered about Allen by one of its own sons when a reporter asked him: “Why is Allen different? I think it is because it hasn’t changed. It has accommodated to change, but it hasn’t changed its own character.” I believe this is reflected in the businesses and their owner/managers profiled here. Allen still has a sense of community even if it has broadened a bit beyond the village. Yet there are still many unanswered questions. For example, how many businesses existed in the area that we do not know of? What about those businesses or business persons for whom we have a name but little information? Finding community members who can identify these and tell us about them is crucial to filling in these gaps. What is the role and impact of women in many Allen businesses.? We have seen some examples where women have had a considerable impact. Studies focusing on women in business in Allen is warranted. What about local businesses run by African Americans? Free blacks have been in the region since at least 1830, yet only a few of their businesses have been identified (see Table 1) and only one is profiled here. There is clearly a lot of work that can be performed to uncover these businesses and their stories while relatives and friends are still around to share them.

The history of the Allen area and by extension its business history is silent on the role and economic activities of the Native Americans who predated the white and black settlers and still dwell in the community and surrounding areas. A significant contribution would be to uncover their story to better understand the context of the history we do know. History of local business

may also contribute to understanding of family history as most businesses in small communities are owned and run by families.³⁹

In conclusion business and economic history can serve as another lens to study local history similar to studies of local: individuals, buildings, churches, schools and other institutions.⁴⁰ Based on this study, one can see that businesses contribute not only to the local economy but also to understanding a region's adaptability to changing technologies and market opportunities. Local business history can also aid in the understanding of the socio-cultural well-being of a community as well as family histories. In this way such histories also help preserve the memory and heritage of people, places, and times.

³⁹ Quote from: Kolb, Jr., "*Memoires*," n.p.; Shivers, *Changing Times*, 73 (re free blacks).

⁴⁰ See for example: Popp, *Entrepreneurial Families*, 2013; Touart, *Somerset, An Architectural History*, 1990.

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