

BUGEYE TIMES

Quarterly Newsletter of the
CALVERT MARINE MUSEUM

Vol. 21 - No. 2

Summer 1996

A SOUTHERN MARYLAND FOREIGN CONNECTION: MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY LAND SPECULATION AT THE MOUTH OF THE PATUXENT RIVER

By Paul L. Berry

The history of Solomons Island prior to its purchase in 1865 by Isaac Solomon has been something of a mystery, the subject of legends by "old-timers" and conjectures by its historians. The absence of factual data resulted largely from the loss of virtually all of the Calvert County land records in the courthouse fires of 1882. Although county clerks were required by law to file abstracts of land transactions with the state, this requirement was either ignored

or many abstracts before 1882 were lost in Annapolis. The critical abstract for the 1865 purchase of Solomons Island did survive, however, and it describes the seller as "... Susannah L. Fitzgerald, committee & trustee of Richard B. Fitzgerald, a lunatic of the City of Baltimore...."¹ During research on the museum's recent book Solomons Island and Vicinity: An Illustrated History and Walking Tour, CMM's curator of maritime history, Richard J. Dodds, came upon interesting new information in the records of the Baltimore City Circuit Court from 1865 to 1880.

These records provided information about Richard B. Fitzgerald and also revealed a previously unknown "foreign connection" to the island and other tracts of land in both Calvert and St. Mary's Counties near the mouth of the Patuxent River.

Calvert and St. Mary's Counties prior to the Civil War were very rural, with tobacco the principal crop. The populations were small and not particularly affluent; land was relatively inexpensive; roads were rudimentary at best; and the transportation depended

largely on the water — bay schooners and steamboats from Baltimore. There certainly seemed little in these counties to attract investment money from Baltimore, and certainly not from foreign investors. And yet, in 1856, a prosperous commission merchant from Baltimore invested in nearly three thousand acres near the mouth of the Patuxent in these two counties, with half of the funds coming from a guano importer from Peru.

In contrast with the southern counties, Baltimore was fast becoming an important center of economic growth, combining an eastern terminus of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad — an outlet for the coal mined in western Maryland — and an active port for imports, including guano from South America that was in demand by Maryland's farmers. The shipping and commission agent, Richard B. Fitzgerald, was in an excellent position for profitable business, particularly linked with guano imports from Peru. His partner and half-brother, Washington Booth, handled the shipment end of the business in Lima, working with a prominent Peruvian family. Two brothers, Felipe and Federico (later Americanized to Frederick) Barreda had government approval to export Peruvian guano, and they split their responsibilities: Felipe stayed in Lima while Frederick worked in Baltimore and New York. All four profited from the arrangement.²

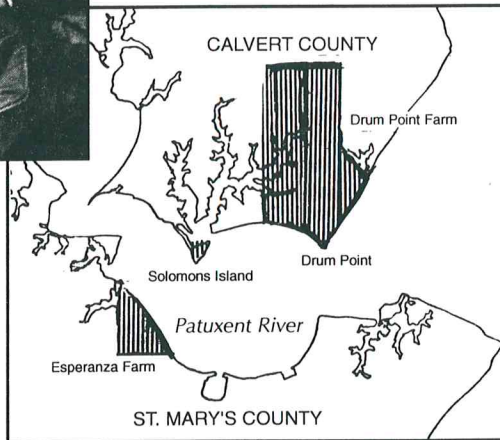
We can only conjecture the reasons that Richard Fitzgerald bought land in

southern Maryland in 1856: some four hundred acres in St. Mary's County in the area then and now known as Esperanza (coincidentally, the Spanish for "hope"); and over twenty-five hundred acres in southern Calvert County, stretching northward from Drum Point

Continued on page 6



Frederick L. Barreda
Photo from CMM Collections



REMEMBER THE BUGEYE BALL DATE!

Remember to hold Friday, September 20, for the 1996 Bugeye Ball, CMM's gala fall event. The ball this year will take place inside the museum's Exhibition Hall, with the entertainment by dance band "Main Street." Invitations will be in the mail during the summer.

A SOUTHERN MARYLAND FOREIGN CONNECTION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and including present-day Solomons Island. Those purchases were recorded in his own name, but as will be clear later, the funds were also from Booth and Frederick Barreda. Calvert County land records do not exist to confirm this; but there are still land records in St. Mary's County that show ownership by Richard Fitzgerald. No reasons for these purchases have been located, but it is possible that it was for speculation that a railroad would be built to either or both locations. In any event, the Civil War soon intervened and delayed economic plans in Maryland.

We do not know the details of Richard Fitzgerald's business during the period from 1856 to 1864, but in late 1864, at the age of fifty-seven, he suffered a serious mental condition, causing his wife to petition the Baltimore City Circuit Court to be named to handle his affairs. After proper investigation, the court on January 13, 1865, designated her as "... a committee for the person and a trustee for the estate of said Richard B. Fitzgerald...." Fitzgerald's holdings in various investments, including a number of properties in the Baltimore area, were estimated to the court as about \$400,000, with an annual income of \$20,000, mostly from land rents in Baltimore.³

Despite what appears to be adequate income, Mrs. Fitzgerald evidently wanted to rid herself of properties in southern Maryland, particularly in Calvert County, so on October 13, 1865, she petitioned the court for permission to sell

... to Isaac Solomon for the sum of six thousand dollars ... all that piece or parcel of land called "Sandy Island" lying and being in Calvert County and State of Maryland near the mouth of the Patuxent River containing eighty acres of land more or less which [was conveyed in 1856] ... to Richard B. Fitzgerald, together with another tract of land not sold.⁴

The court approved the sale on October 19, 1865, and this is the sale that was recorded in the abstract deed found in the Hall of Records in Annapolis. The abstract, however, does not tell the whole story: Mrs. Fitzgerald revealed to the court that although the title to this property appeared in her husband's name, she knew that he was entitled to only one-fourth of the proceeds of the sale, since his partner, Washington Booth, had a one-fourth interest, and Frederick L. Barreda had a half interest. She reported that both Washington Booth and Frederick Barreda knew of and approved the sale.⁵ A later report to the Circuit Court by an accountant divided the sale proceeds among the three investors.

The Barreda family was prominent in Peru, with its members active in governmental and commercial affairs. Frederick Barreda

was the only family member to move to the United States, but he did exceedingly well here. Settling first in Baltimore, he moved in the late 1850s to New York City where the family eventually occupied mansions on Fifth Avenue and later on Madison Avenue. During the early 1860s he served the Peruvian government as minister to the United States, Great Britain, and France. During

this time his wealth allowed him to build a seafront mansion ("cottage") in Newport, Rhode Island, later bought by William Waldorf Astor and renamed "Beaulieu," the name it carries today. So far as can be determined, he did not visit or otherwise take any interest in the Calvert County property until sometime after 1868.⁶

Two events occurred in 1868 that changed this interest: further action by Mrs. Fitzgerald and the other two investors to sell the Fitzgerald/Booth/Barreda southern Maryland properties; and (2) the chartering of the Baltimore and Drum Point Railroad by the Maryland legislature. On June

16, 1868, Frederick Barreda, Washington Booth, and Susannah Fitzgerald petitioned the court to sell the six tracts totaling over 2,400 acres in the Drum Point area of Calvert County, as well as Esperanza of 420 acres in St. Mary's County. The reasons for wanting to sell are interesting:

... the said lands cannot be divided without loss or injury to the said several parties entitled and that the said lands are situated where they cannot be cultivated by the parties entitled thereto and are daily deteriorating in value from neglect, and that it would require immense expenditures of money to make the same profitable or productive⁷

In an interrogatory carried out under orders of the court, Booth stated that the St. Mary's property, "...including stock and every thing on it except the grain, I should value at fifteen thousand dollars. The Drum Point farm, in Calvert County I estimate at eighty thousand dollars."⁸ The court was petitioned in November 1868 to allow the sale of Esperanza to — of all people — Isaac Solomon who agreed to pay \$15,000 in installments of \$3,000 each with interest. The sale was ratified by the court in January 1869.⁹ Not until 1870, however, was it possible to dispose of the Calvert County land. The court was informed on June 9 that a private sale of the 2,400 acres had been arranged with Frederick Barreda for the sum of \$50,000, again in installments over five years. This sale the court ratified on June 9, 1870.¹⁰

Frederick Barreda was still a citizen of Peru, but was now a bona fide land owner in Calvert County. It is doubtful that many residents of the county at the time realized that he had held a half interest in the Drum Point land since 1856, but they certainly now realized that the Peruvian was the owner. The fact that a survey report filed with the state legislature on January 1868 identified



Barreda House at Drum Point.

Photo from CMM Collections

Drum Point as the logical terminus of the Baltimore and Drum Point Railroad no doubt influenced Barreda's decision.¹¹ The railroad company was organized under its state charter in 1868 and began to plan for financing and construction. Barreda was approached by several local supporters to become an investor in the company and a director, to which he agreed in the summer of 1871. CMM is fortunate in having the Barreda correspondence about the railroad, beginning in 1871

and ending in 1875. Although most of the letters are from Daniel R. Magruder of Calvert County and R. S. Steuart of Baltimore, there is at least one letter from Isaac Solomon in December 1871 about company business.¹² These facts added together create a strong presumption that the entire land speculation was always directed toward profiting from the construction of a railroad into southern Maryland. The fate of the Baltimore and Drum Point Railroad, however, is a separate story.

The "foreign connection" — the Barreda family ownership of land in Calvert County — continued up until World War II, but not under Frederick Barreda. After purchasing Drum Point, Barreda did take an interest in the property and built a grand Italianate mansion there — the first residence in Calvert County to have indoor plumbing. His fortunes, however, suffered during a national economic panic of 1873 which was triggered ironically by excessive speculation in railroad investments. Frederick Barreda was forced to sell his mansions in New York and Newport, but held on to Drum Point where he moved with his family in 1875, farming the large estate for a short time. In 1876 he mortgaged the estate to his brother Felipe for \$250,000,¹³ as partial collateral for a large loan from his brother to help retire his debts. In the same year he learned of an opportunity in coffee importing in San Francisco, where he moved in 1876, relocating his family there in 1878. Through default on the mortgage, his brother Felipe became owner of the Drum Point property in 1881.¹⁴ Frederick Barreda died in San Francisco in 1883.¹⁵

Felipe Barreda owned Drum Point until his death in June 1892, leaving the management to relatives, Alexander and Robert Barril (or de Barril). Hulbert Footner devotes a chapter in his book *Charles' Gift* to the Barrils' existence on the estate in the early part of the century. After Felipe Barreda's death, the property passed to his widow and five of his children.¹⁶ The widow died in October 1894, and by 1901 the eldest son, Felipe Barreda y Osma, was sole owner,¹⁷ but he died in May 1915, leaving the property through a codicil to his will to his brother, Enrique Barreda, who in turn relinquished it to his nephew Felipe A. Barreda. Management was *in absentia*, handled until the mid-1920s by the Barrils. The property was then leased to local farmers¹⁸ and unsuccessful efforts were made to sell. Management of the property in the next few years was handled by leases to John B. Gray Jr.¹⁹ who had a purchase option that was to expire on December 31, 1941. This



option was exercised at that time, with the final sale in early 1942.²⁰ Thus the property finally passed out of the hands of the Barreda family, becoming eventually the site of Drum Point development.

Although the foreign ownership of Drum Point was known to county residents after the Civil War, it is doubtful that many realized that it had started as early as 1856, nor did they understand the sequence of events surrounding that ownership. Older residents tell of associations with the farm, possibly through work by a parent as a tenant farmer there; others may remember clearly the mansion that was prominent on the bluff at Drum Point, existing until it was demolished in the 1950s. A Maryland oyster chart of 1908, for example, shows "Barreda House Cupola" as a landmark for locating oyster beds, and Hulbert Footner used the house and land as the setting for one of his adventure stories, *Ramshackle House*. Today, we remember the Barreda family's "foreign connection" only through the name of Barreda Boulevard in Drum Point.

NOTES

1. Calvert County Court of Appeals, Land Records, Abstracts, April 10, 1866, Maryland Hall of Records, MdHR 40,087-3 1-8-2.
2. John Thomas Scharf, *History of Baltimore City and County* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), p. 771, and Frank R. Rutter, "South American Trade of Baltimore," *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, 15th series, IX, September 1897, p. 41.
3. Baltimore City Circuit Court, Equity Record, liber JRB 7, folio 133, Maryland Hall of Records.
4. *Ibid.*, folio 145.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Information about Frederick Barreda and the Barreda family is well covered in Frederick Barreda Sherman, *From the Guadalquivir to the Golden Gate* (Mill Valley, California: privately published by Hill and Smith Company, 1977). A copy is in the museum's archives.
7. Baltimore City Circuit Court, Equity Record, liber JRB 11, folio 181, Maryland Hall of Records.
8. *Ibid.*, folio 186.
9. *Ibid.*, folio 192.
10. *Ibid.*, folio 503.
11. George W. Hughes, *Report on the Survey of a Rail Road Route Connecting the City of Baltimore with Drum Point, on the Patuxent River* (Annapolis: Wm. Thompson, 1868), pp. 17-18, 21.
12. Isaac Solomon to Frederick Barreda, December 6, 1871, Barreda Papers, CMM.
13. Calvert County Land Records, liber JLB 1, folio 200, as cited in liber SS 5, folios 288-91.
14. *Ibid.*, liber SS 5, folios 288-91.
15. These details are from Sherman, *From the Guadalquivir to the Golden Gate*, p. 272.
16. Calvert County Land Records, liber TBT 2, folios 301-05.
17. *Ibid.*, liber GWD 2, folios 188-91.
18. *Ibid.*, liber AAH 19, folios 494-98.
19. *Ibid.*, liber AAH 27, folios 247-50, and liber AAH 46, folios 373-75.
20. *Ibid.*, liber AAH 47, folios 234-39.