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The Brooklyn/Curtis Bay/Fairfield peninsula was originally settled in 1663 by Paul Kinsey who was granted a land patent by Lord Baltimore for property on the northern shore of Marley Creek. A few years later, John Cromwell was granted the remaining land north of the creek which he named "Plantation Fairfield."

The area was used primarily for vegetable and tobacco farming, though its woodlands were used as timber for shipbuilding and wharf construction in Baltimore Towne.

The peninsula remained rural until 1853 when two prominent Fairfield families, the Crisps and Cromwells, became the principal investors in a realty corporation called the "Patapsco Company." Its first major business venture was promoting residential lots in the newly founded town of Brooklyn. Slow housing sales in this community joined the two families in yet another venture three years later.

To stimulate activity between the end of Light Street in the City and Acton's Park, a summer resort complete with a bandstand, hotel and a gambling casino, ^t The two families constructed and operated a toll bridge that was located approximately parallel to the present Hanover Street bridge. Vestiges of the old Acton Park survive today as (Dixon Park.)

Despite the new thoroughfare, residential development in the peninsula continued at a slow pace. This was due primarily to local opposition to the bridge fare and the lack of non-agricultural opportunities.

In 1874, the reorganized Patapsco Land Company of Baltimore City began to promote residential and especially industrial development on its properties, stressing the advantages of a deep water harbor. Once again, efforts at attracting homesteaders failed because of the toll fare. Efforts also failed at attracting industrial growth due to the lack of a rail network and the high cost of commuting for workers living in the City.

Four years later, the Patapsco Land Company negotiated the sale of the toll bridge to the State, which promptly dropped the fare.

Free access between the City and Anne Arundel County encouraged residential growth in Brooklyn but failed to stimulate industrial development.

The major stimulus to industrial activity occurred in 1882 when the B & O Railroad bridged the Ferry Bar Branch and extended a main line through Brooklyn to Curtis Bay where it began building a coal pier. By 1887 various other industries had located in Curtis Bay.

The South Baltimore Car Wheel Company was built alongside the coal pier. Today, these original buildings are still in use but are now owned by the Harris-Heller Company which leases space to a variety of firms. Other industrial companies also relocated to rail-serviced sites. These industries included: Monarch Engineering and Supply Company, steel and smelting furnace makers, National Supply Company, producers of bolts and hardware, Monumental Acid

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Works, now called Olin Corp., and Ryan-MacDonald Company, suppliers of railroad construction equipment.

A rapid growth of residential communities soon followed the industrialization of the southern and eastern portion of the area. Both Curtis Bay and Brooklyn grew into sizable towns. The town of Fairfield, though still rural, had as many as 260 residents by 1893. Masonville, a small community originally used by railroad crews as a stopping point, existed around the junction of Ninth Street and Chesapeake Avenue from the 1890's to the early 1950's. At its halcyon days, the population of this tiny hamlet reached a few hundred residents.¹⁷ The industrial growth from Curtis Bay soon spread into the southeastern segment of Fairfield. In 1896, Martin Wagner Company established a fruit and oyster canning plant at the terminus of what is now Cannery Avenue. Wagner's Point, as the company town came to be called, soon accommodated a row house community built for workers of the plant.

Ellis Company, the first of the many oil and chemical firms to locate in Fairfield, was subsequently purchased by the U.S. Asphalt and Refinery Company which organized the Chesapeake & Curtis Bay Railroad Company in 1915 to serve the southern portion of the Fairfield peninsula. Eventually, U.S. Asphalt convinced the Western Maryland Railroad to provide a barge connection between Wagner's Point - Hawkins Point and the Port Covington Terminal in South Baltimore.

During the years of 1896 and 1919, various chemical companies purchased land east of Fairfield Road and south of Frankfurst Avenue.

Shell Eastern Petroleum continues business today on the same land bought nearly seventy years ago.

In 1918, the entire Fairfield/Curtis Bay peninsula was annexed by Baltimore City.

Land north of the Fairfield community was among the last major segments of the peninsula to be industrially developed. Union Shipbuilding Company, first major employer to locate on the northern shore of the peninsula in the early 1900's was owned entirely by Blacks living in the Fairfield community. It was soon followed by Maryland Shipbuilding and Drydock Company which is still located there. Frank Furst, namesake of the principal road in Fairfield, sold Arundel Corporation land west of Maryland Shipbuilding that remained in use as a farm for some time after the 1919 sale.

Though there was very little private investment between 1930 - 1940, some major access improvements were made to the area at this time. B & O constructed a new rail bridge that linked Hawkins Point and Curtis Bay by rail to the rest of the City. A concrete bridge, replacing the wooden drawbridge connecting Curtis Bay to Fairfield, was completed in 1931.

At the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. Federal Works Administration chose Fairfield as the site for the production of Liberty Ships.

By taking over the Weyerhouses, Union Shipbuilding, Gulf Oil and Raisin Monumental Chemical properties, the U.S. Government assembled the largest shipbuilding yard on the East Coast. Bethlehem

Shipbuilding operated this huge yard until the end of the war.

Vacant land in Brooklyn, Curtis Bay, and Fairfield was soon used to support the war effort. Industry was expanded, storage yards for shipbuilding were found, and new housing for the wartime workers was constructed. Brooklyn Homes and Fairfield Homes, designed to become public housing after the war, eventually linked the disparate communities in one contiguous neighborhood.

The entire peninsula returned to normalcy after the war. Land used for steel fabricating, shipbuilding, and machine production were ~~were~~ returned to the original owners. The City began demolishing the temporary housing, a process not fully completed until 1965.

The change to normalcy left its scars on the area. Streets and rail lines fell into disrepair; housing stock deteriorated. As private industrial growth began, the populations of Brooklyn and Curtis Bay increased, compounding the problem of adequate housing demand.

In 1957, the new Harbor Tunnel Thruway was opened along Brooklyn and through Fairfield. The traffic congestion at the southern end of Hanover Street Bridge was alleviated in the 1960's by the extension of Patapsco Avenue. Most recently, the Outer Harbor Crossing, linking the Beltway at Ordinance Road, has added a structural landmark to the Fairfield/Curtis Bay area.