For nearly three centuries, Leonardtown has been the County Seat of St. Mary’s County as well as the center of commerce and social activity. Today, it is still the center of local government and a bustling town of fine restaurants, unique shops, and old-fashioned charm. Traces of its history can be found throughout its landscape and its commercial buildings, churches and residences. Your journey through our past will start at Tudor Hall Mansion and continue along Courthouse Drive where you will view the Courthouse and the Old Jail Museum. On Washington Street and down various side streets, you will view additional historic buildings, churches and businesses. Each site is numbered and highlighted on this map to assist in your tour. Some sites are open to the public, while others are private residences or offices. Please respect the privacy of owners whose buildings are not open to the public.

EARLY HISTORY
Records indicate that by 1654, county court was conducted at the house of John Hammond in the area known as “Newtown” or “Newtowne Hundred.” During the late 17th century, it appears that court was held at various homes throughout Newtown, and that it wasn’t until 1708 that an official town with a designated courthouse was established. It was during this same year that Phillip Lynes, then Mayor of St. Mary’s City, Maryland’s Colonial Capital, designated fifty acres of land at the head of “Brittons Bay” to be divided into 100 lots. He further ordered that one lot be set aside for a county courthouse to be built at an expense not to exceed 12,000 pounds of tobacco. At this time, Newtown was promptly renamed Seymour in honor of Governor, John Seymour. Nearly 20 years later, Seymour Town was renamed again to Leonard Town in honor of Benedict Leonard Calvert, who was Maryland’s Governor during this period. In the decades that followed, Leonard Town became the place where local residents conducted their official business with the colony.

THE 19TH CENTURY
During the War of 1812, the British blocked the Chesapeake Bay. This crippled the Tidewater economy and subjected areas such as Leonardtown to repeated British plundering and destruction. By 1860, the Town had approximately 35 dwellings within these corporate limits. It was home to the County’s newspaper, two hotels and several stores. During the Civil War, a Union Naval contingent occupied Leonardtown, searching all houses for weapons and supplies intended for shipment across the Potomac to Virginia as Southern Maryland and the Town’s sympathies lay with the South. Leonardtown served as a busy post and steamboat landing until the passing of the steamboat era in the early 1900’s.

THE 20TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT
Leonardtown remains the only incorporated municipality in St. Mary’s County with its own elected Mayor and Town Council. The Town is experiencing a renaissance of its downtown as witnessed by recent openings of several new restaurants and businesses, some of which are located in historic buildings. Plans are underway to revitalize and transform the Leonardtown Wharf at the foot of Washington Street into a public waterfront park along with a mix of retail shops, office space, and residential units. Facilities for boating, kayaking and canoeing are also planned.

THE LEONARDTOWN MURAL
The Leonardtown Mural was created to depict various periods in Leonardtown’s history. On the left, the painting shows a turn-of-the-century theme; to the right, the chronology advances to the mid-1950’s. Illustrated in sepia tones is the 1865 arrest of Congressman Benjamin G. Harris on charges of treason on the porch of the Fenwick Hotel.

The open door symbol means this building is open to the public.

The binoculars symbol means this structure should be viewed from the street.

Additional information may be obtained by contacting:

Commissioners of Leonardtown
41660 Courthouse Drive, P.O. Box 1
Leonardtown, Maryland 20650
(301) 475-9791
e-mail: leonardtown.commissioners@verizon.net

Leonardtown.com

St. Mary’s County Division of Tourism
23115 Leonard Hall Drive, P.O. Box 653
Leonardtown, Maryland 20650
(301) 475-4200 x 1404
or (800) 327-9023
web: www.stmarysmd.com/tourism

Read more about Leonardtown’s history between 1650-1950

A Most Convenient Place by Alec Loker of Leonardtown
Available at the Town Office
Call (301) 475-9791 for details.

A variety of books on local history may be found at the Historical Society’s bookstore located at Tudor Hall Mansion.

THE LEONARDTOWN WALKING TOUR
In 1876, the county commissioners specified the original County Jail was abandoned and offered for public sale. Dr. Andrew Jackson Spalding purchased the old jail and lot and used the bricks in constructing his new home, which was eventually called Camaler House. The house is a two-and-one-half story, side-passage plan dwelling that represents one of the earliest extant in-town residences. Roosting modest Greek Revival detailing and proportions, the exterior features painted wood lintels over the doors and windows and distinctive bridged chimneys situated on the north gable end of the house. After the Civil War, the home was sold to Frank Neale Holmes, who also owned a store and the steamboat pier at Leonardtown Wharf.

The Mercantile Bank of Southern Maryland is a two-story, brick commercial building designed in the Classical Revival-style. Constructed in 1921, it serves as the southern visual terminus for Washington Street. Its classical design illustrates a style commonly used by banking institutions in the early 20th century. This building served as a symbol of the economic prosperity of Leonardtown—a town that was increasingly seen as not only the seat of government, but as the social, religious, commercial, and financial center of St. Mary's County.

Located in Town Square, the World War I Memorial lists the names of 27 men who made the supreme sacrifice for their country. It was dedicated on November 11, 1921. Ceremonies included a parade complete with a brass band, ex-servicemen in uniform, and the Red Cross. There were 1,500 people in attendance. Since then, the memorial has served as the focal point for the Town and an annual Veterans Day parade which is among the largest in the State.

Located in Town Square, the Deceased Veterans Memorial honors 79 St. Mary’s County men killed or missing in action: 61 in World War II, 5 in the Korean War and 13 in the Vietnam War. The dedication followed the annual Veterans Day parade on November 11, 2001.

This structure was originally a movie theater known as “The New Theater.” It was constructed, circa 1945, of cinder blocks supported by brick buttresses that permitted the walls to reach a more elevated height. Movies were shown here until the late 1970’s. While the front of the theater has been drastically changed, the actual theater space has been preserved and is undergoing renovation for use as a banquet room.

The Union Hotel (The Carousel) (1850), is located on the west side of Washington Street. According to a notice of sale posted in the November 26, 1857 issue of the St. Mary’s Beacon, the Union Hotel could accommodate 100 guests and had stables for 200 horses. According to the notice, the building was “foreclosed for rent.”

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