
The Lancaster, Cecil & Southern

The branch line to Providence

By
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Introduction

This report by the Historical Society of Cecil County documents the history of an abandoned branch railroad line that began at the Childs Station on the Baltimore and Ohio and followed the Little Elk Creek to the mill village of Providence, a distance of approximately 4½ miles. Data for this limited investigation were collected by reviewing applicable literature, researching historical sources, and harvesting documentary information in readily available primary sources. Since it was a limited investigation, it did not involve interviewing subject matter experts or those with direct knowledge of the line, nor did it include field work.¹ Repositories used for the investigation consisted of the Eva M. Muse Library of the Historical Society of Cecil County, the Cecil County Courthouse, and the Katherine B. Alexander Memorial Library in Oxford, PA. Records consulted were business and trade journals, land records, state laws, maps, local newspapers, and photographs. The study contains the following sections: introduction; background; review of the literature; history of the Lancaster, Cecil & Southern (L C & S); a timeline; suggestions for additional research; and conclusions. This introductory report can provide the groundwork for a comprehensive investigation.

Review of the Literature

Since the L. C. & S. is a seldom examined spur it has a limited amount of literature available for review. Primary sources are confined to bits and pieces of information widely scattered in primary sources, such as period newspapers, legal proceedings, and maps. Secondary sources include the title by Herbert Harwood, Jr, and he provides several paragraphs of information as he deals with the history of the overall eastern section of the B & O. Additionally, George W. Hilton presents some data on the Lancaster, Oxford, and Southern in his work on the Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad. Local Oxford, PA histories touch briefly on plans for the line there.

Background

The Little Elk Creek, one of two tributaries draining rural northeastern Cecil County, flows through what once was a corridor of commerce and industry, beginning at the dawn of the industrial age. Its headwater rise at an unnamed lake eight-tenths of a mile south of Oxford PA as it runs south-southeast towards its confluence a short distance south of Elkton, where it becomes the Elk River. The basin drains 26.8 mi² as it flows gently southward, winding through Fair Hill, Providence, and Childs. This swirling waterway supplied power for mills that ground flour, made paper, processed wool, and produced other goods while pumping money into the local economy. The location of the

¹ National Park Service, NPS-28: Cultural Resource Management Guideline, Chapter 2 Research. This document defines levels of investigation for cultural resources: exhaustive, thorough, and limited.

stream was particularly valuable since the power it provided could easily be harnessed and it was near navigable water midway between two great Atlantic coast cities. In addition, once railroad facilities ran nearby, enabling manufacturers to get their products to market, it made what one source identified as sites probably unsurpassed by any other in the country.^{2,3}

Due to favorable geography, nature of the terrain, and course taken by the stream, mills sprang up along its banks and manufacturing continued until well into the 20th century. Consequently a wealthy Philadelphia Industrialist, William Singerly, the editor and publisher of a one-cent newspaper, the *Philadelphia Record*, stepped off the train in Elkton in 1880. He climbed aboard a carriage for a trip to Providence, where he carefully examined the site of an old paper mill on the Little Elk Creek. The capitalist soon procured the title to the property and set out to build a modern paper mill on the site. Once he rebuilt the operation, it was producing more than twenty tons of paper a day. At the same time, a number of new homes were constructed and by 1892 the *Cecil Whig* said the village 6 ½ miles north of Elkton was a busy settlement, the population comprising the 200 employees of the paper mill, with their families forming a total count of between 400 and 500.⁴

He also purchased a wharf and ground along the Big Elk Creek in Elkton, where he constructed a pulp mill four years later. His mills were about nine miles apart, so he rebuilt what one newspaper called the worst road in the county, in order to connect the two places. At his own expense, he covered the greater portion of it with crushed stone. After it was built, the *Cecil Whig* said it was confident that there was one good road in the county, if no more.

The Little Elk Creek provided an important source of industrial power for manufacturing in Cecil's pre-electrification age and thus a variety of factories occupied the banks of the busy, rapidly flowing stream. But one of the challenges to profitability was the expense of hauling materials and supplies to the mills. Originally, Elk Landing was the nearest point for shipment for the factories. The construction of the P. W. & B. railroad in 1836 shortened the distance by a mile and from that year until the completion of the Baltimore & Ohio (B & O), the expense of hauling was a significant cost for local manufacturers.

The last spike was driven on the new B & O railroad across Cecil in 1886. Near where the tracks cross Singerly Road, the company built a Queen Ann Style Station and named it after the publisher. Described as the principal station on the road in Cecil, many passenger trains stopped at the depot and the freight business grew, for the location was advantageous for shipping. Mills along the busy Little Elk Creek hauled goods to the station for shipment to city markets. That continued until 1893, when the Lancaster, Cecil, & Southern, (L C & S), a spur from Childs to Providence, a distance of about 4 ½

² Ronald A. Sloto, U.S. Geological Survey, *Geohydrology and Ground-Water Quality, Big Elk Creek Basin, Chester County, Pennsylvania & Cecil County, Maryland*, New Cumberland, PA: 2002;

³ United States Geological Survey, Geographic Names Information System

⁴ *Cecil Whig*, The Paper Mills of Cecil County, September 3, 1892

miles, opened for traffic, bringing rails to the doors of the manufacturers along the creek. For over a half-century, the spur served industries on the stream.

The Maryland State Gazetteer and Baltimore City Business Directory for 1902/1903 described Childs and Providence, the villages at the beginning and the end of the L C & S R. R.⁵

CHILDS – Located in Cecil County with a population of 120 persons, 4 miles north of Elkton C. H. and on B & O R. R. 48 miles from Baltimore. Elkton is the banking town. Stages to Blake and Elkton. Long distance telephone. Ex. U.S. Daniel H. McCauley, postmaster; Daniel, J. Y., canner; Gallagher, H. E. Carpenter; Garrett C. S. & Son, paper manufacturers; Harvey & Blake, flour mill; Marrett, Jas. stock farm; Smith, Walter I. Warehouse.

PROVIDENCE – Post office in Cecil County, 5 miles from Elkton C. H., the banking and shipping point. Population 75 Ex. U.S., Cullery, Benj F., grocer; Kenmore Pulp and Paper Co.; Kite W. P. Grist mill, Settle, Lottie A., General Store and postmaster; and Walton S. F. Grocer.

The Lancaster, Cecil, & Southern

In 1878, the Peach Bottom Railway, a narrow gauge line that was supposed to go from the Pennsylvania coalfields to Philadelphia was established. The Eastern Division of the line was constructed from Oxford, Pa to Peach Bottom on the banks of the Susquehanna River, a distance of about 20 miles. Subsisting on meager local traffic, the Eastern Division was sold at a bankruptcy auction in September 1881. In 1890, a group of Lancaster businessmen reorganized the company as the Lancaster, Oxford and Southern Railroad. The new owners hoped to use the rambling and twisting road as a link that would allow the B & O to enter Lancaster. One aspect of this plan involved building a branch of the L. O. & S south toward Maryland.^{6,7}

The charter of the Lancaster, Cecil, & Southern, granted in February 1892, authorized it to build a road from Elkton to the Pennsylvania state line to meet the L. O. & S, and the \$200,000 in capital stock was sold on the first day.⁸ Initially two route segments were under consideration from Providence to a point on the B & O, either Singerly or Childs. On the Singerly route, which was about 1,400-feet longer, several

⁵ B. R. Sheriff, Maryland State Gazetteer and Baltimore city Business Director for 1902 and 1903, R. L. Polk & Co: Baltimore.

⁶ Herbert H. Harwood, Jr., Royal Blue Line: The Classic B & O Train between Washington and New York, 82-83, Johns Hopkins University Press

⁷ The Board of Trade, Oxford: A Representative Pennsylvania Borough, Oxford, PA: Oxford Press, 1894, pp 15 - 17

⁸ *Cecil Whig*, The L. O. & S. R. R. Company, June 11, 1892 p. 3; the Maryland Department of Assessments & Taxation has issued department ID # D00520387 to the Lancaster, Cecil & Southern Railroad Company. It's state is listed as merged, and its principal office is Tax Dept. J910, 500 Water Street, Jacksonville, FL 32202.

property owners objected to granting right-of-ways and by the Childs alternative additional mills could be tapped for freight traffic.⁹ Preferring Childs, the company started acquiring the right-away in April and May 1892.¹⁰ Extensive excavating, grading, and bridging was necessary, as the tracks followed the tortuous course of the creek but by July there was an “air of hustle” along the stream for 300 men worked grading, ballasting, and laying rails. At Carter’s cut, a new steam drill was working. By September, trains ran as far as Harlan’s Mill and the contractor was grading at Providence. Finally by February 1893 trains rolled into the terminus.¹¹ Railroads schemes were numerous in this period, but, regardless, the reopening of the Providence Mill created an immense shipping business at this remote point.

The spur from the Childs’ Station of the B & O to this terminus brought rails to the doors of a number of manufacturers on the creek in 1893. While this spur was not a long one (a little over four miles), it was important to mill owners. This line was never designed to be adapted to rapid travel because of the grades and curves, but such demands would never be placed on it wrote the *Cecil Whig*. Starting at Childs it touched Marley Paper Mill where there was a twelve car siding. From there it passed close by Harlan’s Book Board Mill and then it ran up the west side of the of the creek to Carter’s Cecil Paper Mills, where it crossed the Little Elk Creek twice and followed the west bank of the stream to Levis & Brothers Flour Mill. It finally reached Providence Paper Mill. A Baltimore & Ohio locomotive made a daily run from Wilmington to handle the Freight work along the line.

It was an important branch for it served the industries along the creek. Once it started operating, promoters noted that it would not be too long before it opened up the northern part of the county to Oxford, Pa., a distance of about 8 miles, but this is as far as the L. C. & S. got. Though operated by the B & O, it remained a separate company until 1899 when the larger road acquired ownership. From then on the spur supported itself off the dwindling freight traffic from the mills along the line. Before it was completely abandoned in 1972, it was reduced to a distance of about a mile.¹²

Timeline

- ❖ September 25, 1880 – An engineer completed estimates for building the Little Elk Creek Railroad. It was surveyed to run from Elkton up the valley of Little Elk to Providence Mill, which was being rebuilt by William Singerly. It would pass Mackall’s Grist and Saw Mill, Marley’s Paper Mill, Harlan’s Paste Board Mills, and Cecil Paper Mill. The estimate for building the road was \$194,000 and the last four miles were through very “nubbly” country and would require rock excavations.¹³

⁹ *Oxford Press*, Good News, February 3, 1892, p3

¹⁰ Cecil County Land Records, JAD 23, 563 – 605 April, May 1892.

¹¹ *Oxford*,

¹² *Ibid* P. 83

¹³ *Cecil Democrat*, September 25, 1880, Little Elk Creek Railroad

- ❖ December 5, 1891 – Colonel Slaymaker and a crew of surveyors departed from Oxford to survey a line to Childs Station on the B & O instead of Singerly. Many advantages made this route desirable including the fact that the cost of the right-away was more expensive on the old route and it came into contact with the Garrett Mill and the old burnt Levi Mill which was being rebuilt, it was reported.¹⁴
- ❖ February 6, 1892 – The certificate of incorporation of the L C & S Railroad was filed with the Secretary of State. It was reported that originally the route was to run to Singerly Station on the B & O but that it was now determined to bring the line from Oxford down the west bank of the Little Elk to Childs on the B & O and take in the mills along the creek. It would have its terminus at Elkton. The incorporators were W. M. Showalter and J. M. Showalter of Pennsylvania, and I. Day Carter, Robert Mackey, and W. T. Warburton of Cecil County.¹⁵
- ❖ April 23, 1892 – Engineer A. M. Nevin and Mr. W. T. Warburton were busy acquiring deeds for the right-of-way. This piece of the road will be about four miles and the remaining nine miles from Providence to Oxford would shortly be completed.¹⁶
- ❖ April 30, 1892 – Preparations were being made for building the Childs to Providence section of the “Lancaster, Oxford and Southern Railroad” by the B & O and the contractor was Thomas N. Connell. The cost of the contract was between \$65,000 and \$75,000, which included all the necessary grading, masonry, bridge work, cross ties and ballast¹⁷
- ❖ April/May 1892 – The Cecil County land records contains a number of deed transfers, showing the right-away that was acquired by the railroad.¹⁸

Table 1. Right Away Acquisitions

<i>Date</i>	<i>Right Away Acquired From</i>	<i>Cost</i>
<i>May 3, 1892</i>	William M. Singerly	\$1.
<i>April 8, 1892</i>	Joseph & Anna levis	\$1500.
<i>April 20, 1892</i>	I. Day & Elizabeth Carter	\$1
<i>April 3, 1892</i>	William Brougan	\$1100

¹⁴ *Cecil Whig*, December 5, 1891, Survey A New Line; taken from the Oxford Press.

¹⁵ *Cecil Democrat*, Lancaster, Cecil, & Southern February 6, 1892 p. 3

¹⁶ *Cecil Democrat*, Local Matters, April 23, 1892, p. 3

¹⁷ *Cecil Whig*, April 30, 1892, Local News

¹⁸ Cecil County Land Records, May 1892

<i>April 2, 1892</i>	George & Sarah Harlan	\$2500
<i>May 20, 1892</i>	Casper & Elizabeth Garrett	\$1
<i>May 14, 1892</i>	Jacob Tome	\$3500
<i>April 23, 1892</i>	John & Anna Dunsmore	\$60
<i>April 2, 1892</i>	John & Alice Settle	\$575
<i>April 3, 1892</i>	Daniel & Catherine Harvey	\$1
<i>April 30, 1892</i>	William & Elizabeth Harvey	\$3550

- ❖ June 11, 1892 – Authorized to construct a line from Elkton to the Pennsylvania line, the capital stock was \$200,000. When the books opened for subscriptions at the office of W. T. Warburton in Elkton on May 4th, all of it was taken in one day. At a meeting of the stockholders the following were elected to the board: Walter M. Franklin, Joseph M. Showalter, W. T. Warburton, J. W. B. Baucman, J. E. Ramsey, Robert B. Patterson, and John C. Hager.¹⁹
- ❖ July 2, 1892 – Work on the L C & S was going along smoothly and Contractor Connell had nearly finished grading the lower half of his contract. He had 123 men at work grading and a large force on masonry. Work on that portion of the road between Rock Church and Oxford would begin in the fall.²⁰
- ❖ July 23, 1892 – Work on the Cecil terminus of the “Lancaster, Oxford & Southern” was progressing rapidly. About one mile had been ballasted and the rails laid. These tracks were being used to carry supplies to the 300 men at work on the road and before long, it was noted, that all the large mills on the creek would be supplied with railroad facilities.²¹
- ❖ September 17, 1892 – By this time, the line was completed to Marley Mills and freight was being carried to that point. It was also reported that the survey of the road from Providence to Oxford would be completed next month. The contractor had been given an extension of two months to complete the line to Providence.²²

¹⁹ *Cecil Whig*, The L. C. & S. R. R. Company, June 11, 1892, p. 3.

²⁰ *Cecil Democrat*, Local Matters, July 2, 1892, p. e

²¹ *Cecil Democrat*, Local Matters, July 23, 1892 p. 3.

²² *Cecil Whig*, September 17, 1892, Local news

- ❖ February 1, 1893 – Twenty carloads of freight a day were being hauled over the L. C. & S. R.R. to Providence²³
- ❖ March 25, 1893 – The County Commissioners were invited to make an inspection of the road bed. Commissioners Price, Cameron, Clerk Smith and others accepted the invitation and drove to Childs for the tour. The B & O furnished an engine and coach for the occasion. The cars stopped at every crossing. The *Cecil Democrat* observed that the construction of the road was excellent, particularly the bridges, which were iron with a granite base. The paper reported that the company anticipated operating the line as a freight road for some time, but a passenger train would be put on as soon as there was any indication of patronage. It was reported that already the freight traffic was considerable, for the short distance of a little over four miles, the road running directly past Marley Paper Mill, Harlan's Pasteboard Mills, Cecil Paper Mills, Levi's Flour Mill and the Providence Paper Mill, all of which shipped large quantities of goods. It was anticipated that the road would be extended to Oxford, Pa.²⁴
- ❖ May 27, 1893 -- The managers of the L. O. & S. reported the construction of the remaining 8 ½ of the road from Oxford to Providence Paper Mill (Irwinton Station) will begin in the spring of 1894. The present five miles of the road in Cecil County, now owned and managed by the L. O. & S., running from Childs Junction on the B & O, will be operated by the B & O until the extension is completed. The stations on this part of the line are: Childs Junction, Marley, Hillside, Irwinton.²⁵
- ❖ September 9, 1912 – The Conowingo Power Company took over the Lancaster, Oxford & Southern Railroad. The railway company was bought at a receiver's sale by its bondholders for \$50,000 and sold to the Conowingo Syndicate at \$32,000. Valuable ferry rights were included in the deal.²⁶
- ❖ September 25, 1948 – The old mill at Providence, which had been in continuous operation for more than 60 years, closed leaving some 200 employees without work. The *Cecil Democrat* said the closure was a blow to residents and small business interests in the area since there were few industries of any importance to which the 200 workers could turn. Obviously with the closure of the large industry on the spur, freight traffic would be reduced.²⁷
- ❖ August 5, 1954 – The Providence Paper Mill, which had not been in operation since World War II, was being renovated in preparation for resuming operation, when a fire raced through the large manufacturing structure. With the destruction of the mill, the potential for any large shipment of freight stopped on the upper end of the branch

²³ *Oxford Press*, Local News, February 1, 1893 p.1.

²⁴ *Cecil Democrat*, March 25, 1893, Cecil's New Railroad

²⁵ *Cecil Democrat*, May 27, 1893, Local Matters, P 3.

²⁶ *Wall Street Journal*, Public Utilities, September 9, 1912, P 6

²⁷ *Cecil Democrat*, Mill Closes: Local Families Affected by Providence Shutdown, September 25, 1948, p.

line, though limited manufacturing remained on the on the lower end of the line, at the Childs industrial site.²⁸

- ❖ May 10, 1972 – The Lancaster, Cecil, and Southern Railroad Company and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company gave notice that on the 12th day of April 1972, they filed with the Interstate Commerce Commission an application permitting abandonment of the Childs branch from Childs Station to a distance of approximately 1.14 miles in Cecil County.²⁹

Figure 2. The L C & S at Providence (about 1914)

Suggestions for Additional Research

This is an initial survey of the local literature concerning this road. It is suggested that collections at the National Archives and the Library of Congress be mined for additional data. The valuation papers of the Interstate Commerce Commission will provide technical details on the line, as well as structures. The I.C.C. tariff papers will provide technical data on shipping and freight traffic. There may also be photographs of the stations, which will be helpful.

Conclusions

Railroads, by their very nature, influenced the development and settlement of regions, and the L. C. & S., although a small spur of about 4 ½ miles to Providence, is no exception. It moved goods, raw and finished through the scenic Little Elk Creek valley, and provided important shipping access for the mills along the industrial waterway, which had a significant number of commercial sites. From when it opened in 1893 until traffic started dwindling away in the 20th century, it was an important freight spur. By 1972, the line was completely abandoned.

²⁸ *Cecil Whig*, Fire Destroys Providence Paper Mill: Damage Estimated at About \$250,000., August 5, 1954

²⁹ Legal Notice, May 10, 1972, *Cecil Whig*

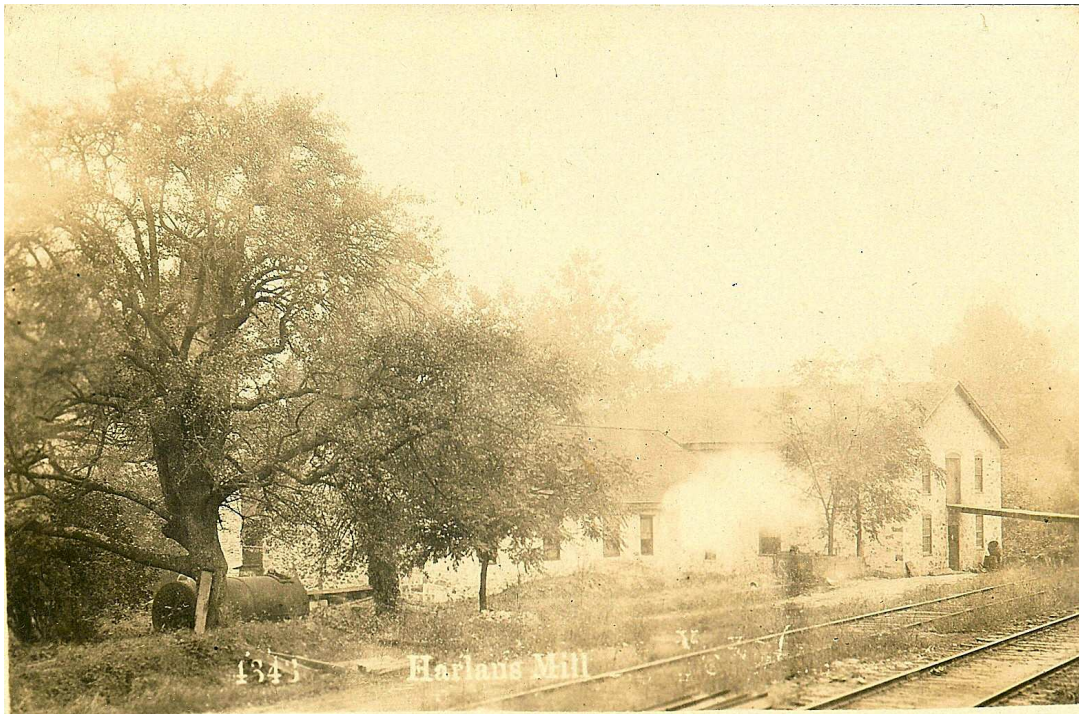


Figure 1. The L. C. & S. handled freight for Harlan's Mill

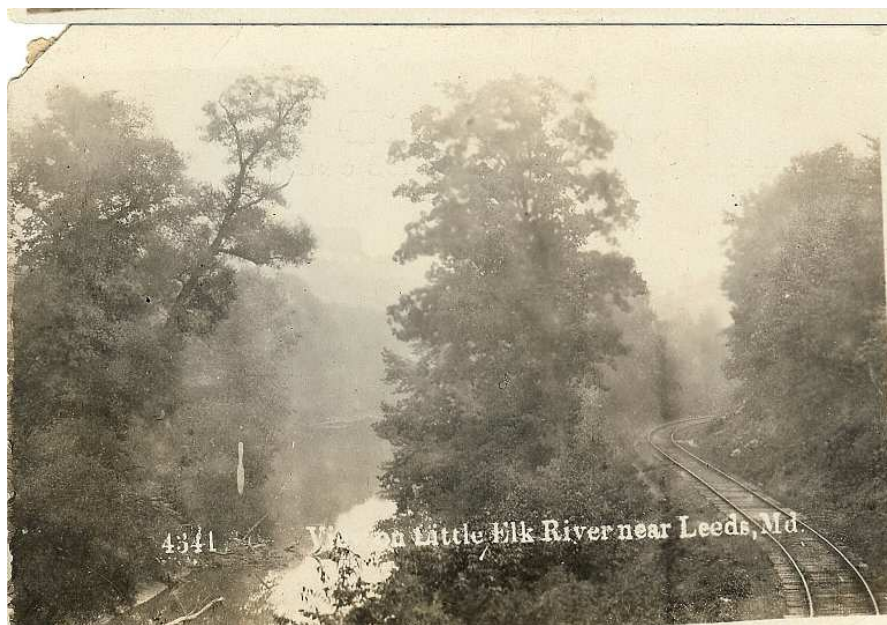


Figure 2. The L. C. & S winds its way up the valley



Figure 4. Providence Mill, the end of the line, about 1912

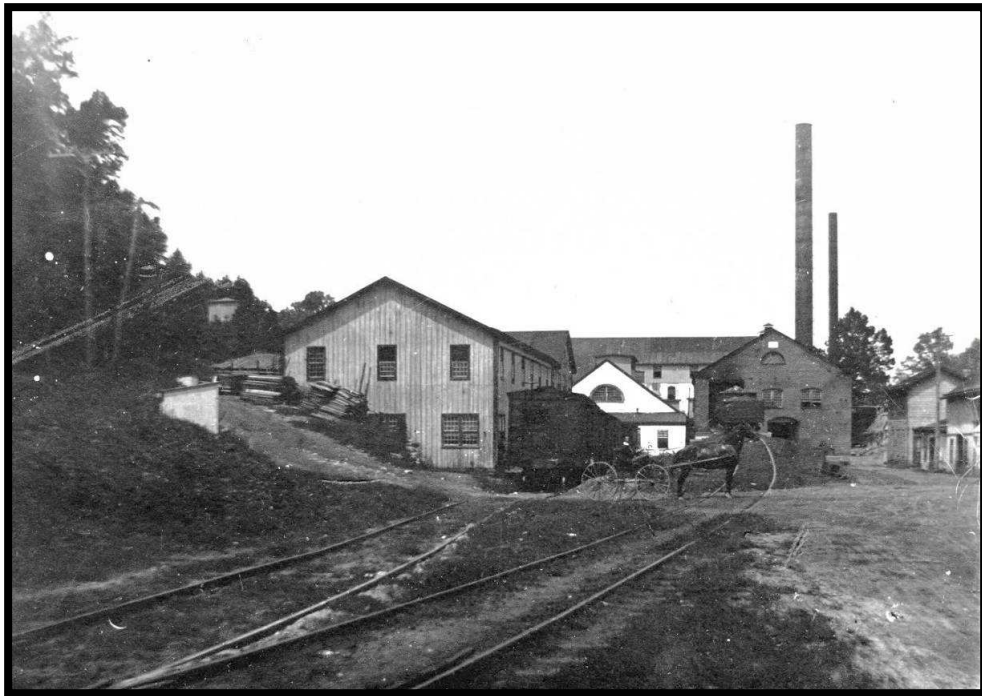
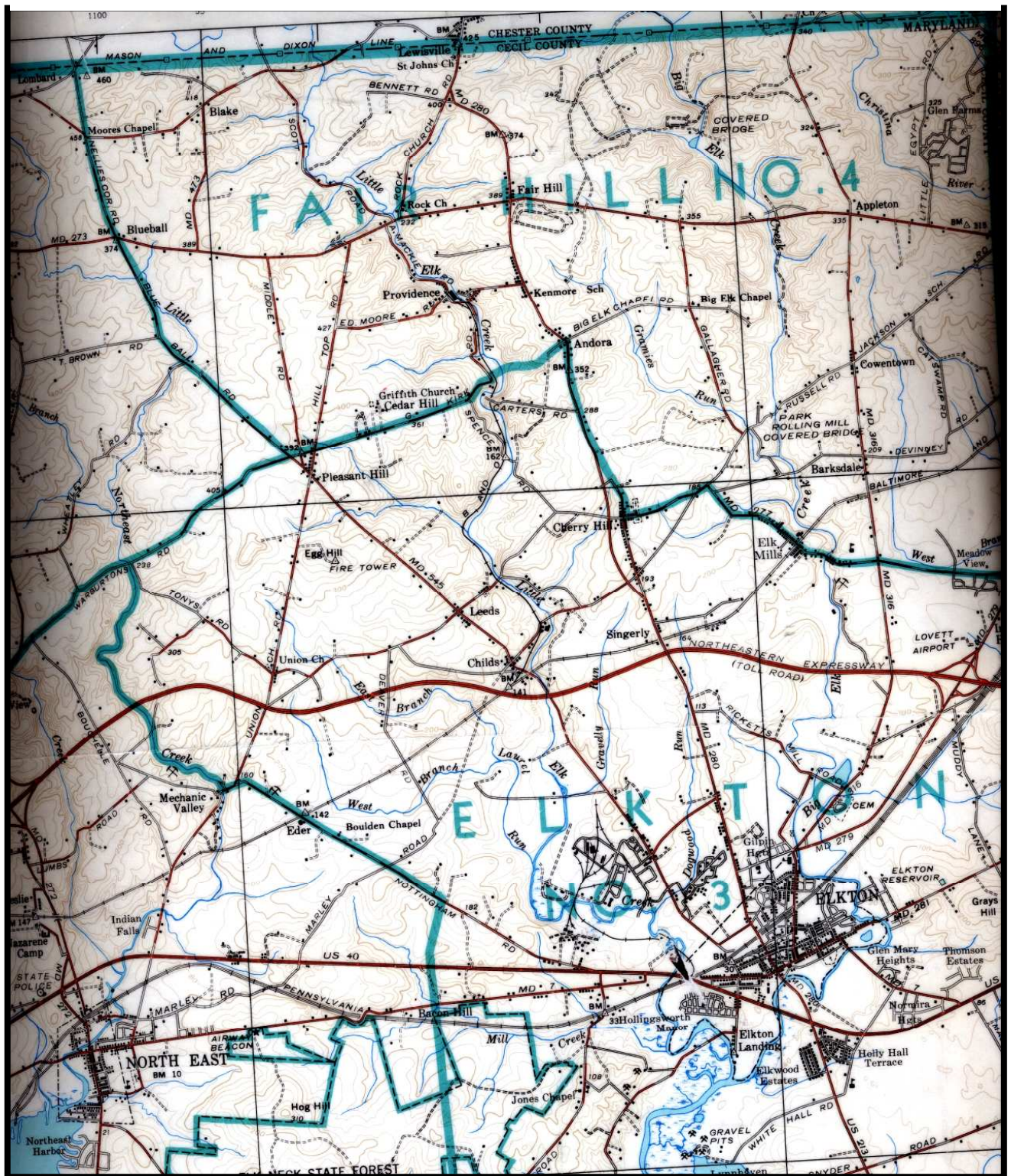


Figure 3. Providence Mill about 1912

Figure 5. 1962 U. S. G. S. Survey Map



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