

K-597

circa 1813

Site of Galena Silver Mine

Near Galena

Private

In the wooded escarpment that bounds the northeast side of the plateau on which the old black community of Olivet Hill is located, east of Galena, is the traditional site of a silver mine that operated, apparently briefly, in the early nineteenth century. There are no longer any above-ground remains to indicate the presence of such a mine, only a sunken area about 15 feet wide by about 40 to 50 feet long perpendicular to the escarpment. It is said to be the collapsed and eroded entry tunnel. Though the existence of the silver mine cannot be well documented, the oral tradition kept the story alive of an unusual early Kent County enterprise. Though it was said to have been a marginally successful one and ceased operations during the period of anticipation of British attack in 1813, silver articles from its ore were said to have been made in Philadelphia. In recognition of the one-time nearby mine, the Town of Galena in 1860 derived its name from one kind of silver ore, whether or not this was actually the type found here. The site may still have archeological significance.

Maryland Historical Trust

State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Site of Galena Silver Mine

and/or common

2. Location

street & number Northeast side of embankment northeast of Olivet Hill, southwest
of east fork of Mill Creek; .2 miles south not for publication
city, town Galena vicinity of congressional district

state Maryland county Kent

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Jeanne Washington Wright and Roosevelt W. Wright

street & number 1714 Elm Street - P.O. Box 3749 telephone no.:

city, town Harrisburg state and zip code PA 17105

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Kent County Court House liber 67

street & number Cross Street folio 192

city, town Chestertown state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys None

title

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date of move <u>NA</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			
NA: site only				

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

In the wooded escarpment that bounds on the northeast side the plateau on which the old black community of Olivet Hill is located, east of Galena, is the traditional site of a silver mine that operated, apparently briefly, in the early nineteenth century. There are no longer any above-ground remains to indicate the presence of such a mine, but just a sunken area about 15 feet wide by about 40 to 50 feet long perpendicular to the man-made pond below. It is said to be the collapsed and eroded entry tunnel.

The supposed mine site is in a 5+ acre tract that cannot be reached except by crossing private property. It is behind the property on which the most northeasterly house in the Olivet Hill community is located, reached on foot by passing the house to the northwest and then going down the heavily wooded embankment about half way. At the foot of the embankment is a recently-created farm pond in the east fork of Mill Creek. Alternatively, the site can be reached from the lower farm that fronts on Route 290, the Galena-Sassafras Road, from which the site can also be seen at a distance.

The sunken area is said to have been somewhat higher and more level earlier in the century. This may be related to final collapse of any tunnel supports, though in termite and rot prone Kent County, it is hard to believe that wood in a damp, on-the-ground tunnel would have survived very long, even locust posts. An undated clipping in the papers of the late Justine P. Woodall says that old mine machinery could be seen long after the mine ceased operations. It does not specify the type of machinery, and none appears to be there now. According to Clinton Riley of Galena, who owned the property from 1968 to 1973, for a time the area was an unauthorized site for trash dumping, frustrating treasure seekers who visit from time to time with metal detectors. The embankment woods now seem undisturbed except seasonally, by deer hunters, who have built high platforms along deer runs.

Physiographically, and perhaps geologically, the site with its abrupt change of elevation is quite untypical of Kent County terrain, though it is somewhat similar to other locations where the high general land mass is cut by creeks that empty into the Sassafras River. It is doubtful that the site has ever been evaluated by archeologists or geologists.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates Circa 1812-1813 **Builder/Architect**

check: Applicable Criteria: A B C D
and/or

Applicable Exception: A B C D E F G

Level of Significance: national state local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

Though the existence of an old silver-ore mine site stated to be on the embankment northwest of Olivet Hill has not yet been documented, belief in it and knowledge of its supposed location have persisted for generations through the oral tradition. If indeed there was such a silver mine there, it probably was a unique example of metal-ore mining in Kent County. What structures related to such a mine might have been in the vicinity, besides a supported tunnel entrance, are not known. The site may merit archeological investigation.

When asked about the location of the old silver mine, numerous older people long in the Galena area pointed out exactly the same location on the embankment. They had been told the location and the story by their parents, and so on; some had hunted in those woods as children with their parents and had been shown its location then.

Documentary evidence is almost totally lacking, however. One hindrance is that during the period the mine was said to have been in operation, about 1813, no newspaper was being published in Kent County. The only newspaper being published on the entire Eastern Shore was the Easton Republican Star. Although such information might not have been published in a newspaper at all, that paper could be searched, as well as the Gazette of Annapolis and the Niles Weekly Register of Baltimore. All three papers occasionally published items relating to Kent County. For instance, the Gazette not long before the attack on Georgetown and Fredericktown during the War of 1812, in May 1813, did write of a report from Georgetown Crossroads (now Galena) that the local population was in great fear of attack from the British in the Bay and were preparing themselves, apparently by accumulating arms and by hiding things that might be considered of value to the British.

Frederick G. Usilton, a Chestertown newspaperman who published a book in 1916 called History of Kent County, Maryland, 1630-1916 (republished with an update by William B. Usilton, III, in 1980), was aware of the persistence of the story of the silver mine and devoted a brief section in his book to it. He says (p. 163):

In or about the year 1813 valuable and pure silver was found near Galena. Mrs. M. H. Nickle of Baltimore says: "Sufficient quantities were taken out to be carried to Philadelphia and manufactured into knee buckles, spoons, casters, and other such articles." The then open mine or valuable deposit was closed, as it was owned by very ignorant white and colored people and they were advised to closed it, as it was about the time the British came to Georgetown, a place only two miles distant. They were told that if the English knew of this mine they would claim it. They never made any more effort to open it and the war and natural excitement which succeeded the war prevented others from taking hold of it, who otherwise would have done so. Two or three years ago some specimens on this tract were picked up and taken to Prof. W. Leslie Rumsell, analytical chemist, and examined by him. They proved to be horn silver, very pure. The present owner says she is too poor to have it properly mined.

There is some question as to whether historically the mine was once part of the adjacent farm which the supposed mine site now overlooks (the first farm east of Galena on the south side of Rt. 290), or whether it was part of Olivet Hill property. The branch of Mill Creek was likely to have been utilized as a natural boundary, however. Martenet's 1860 map of Kent County, difficult to read, does not seem to show a farmhouse at all in the location of the present one, though it is not clear to which property the name E(d?) Crouch should be attributed. Perhaps the farm was once part of a larger one. The relevant map of the 1877 atlas of Kent County shows a farmhouse in the approximate location of the present one. The owner is shown as C. L. Nickle, also shown as the owner of a house along the old road (not the present route) near the north end of the mill pond for Anthony's Mill to the north. It is quite possible that Frederick Usilton, in preparation for his 1916 book, consulted Mrs. M. H. Nickle of Baltimore because of her relationship to the Nickle family that once owned the farm near the mine. Perhaps her testimony can be considered trustworthy, though she was speaking of what had occurred 100 years earlier.

Usilton is not very clear in speaking of the mine's being owned by both "white and colored people." It is questionable whether it would be owned by such a group rather than one individual or family. The property may have been owned fairly early in the nineteenth century by free blacks, who early began a community in what is now called Olivet Hill. The earliest black ownership in Olivet Hill was not researched, however, though it was discovered to have some black ownership in 1851.

Though no one now seems to know why, Olivet Hill seems to have been
(continued)

known as Oliver's Hill. Whether this is a popular corruption of Olivet or indicates possible one-time ownership by a person named Oliver is not known. However, some older local people refer to it by that name, and it does appear in deeds. It is possible that the name Olivet Hill came into common usage as a modification of Oliver's Hill, especially considering the fact that the Methodist church in Galena, within view of Olivet Hill, bears the name Olivet and the fact that the first church building of the black Methodist congregation of Olivet Hill was the old one from Olivet Church, given to the blacks. The black congregation's later (c. 1905) building's cornerstone bears the name Olivet Church as well (but not Olivet Hill). However, the name Olivet may not have been attached to the Galena white Methodist church until well into the nineteenth century. It earlier seems to have been known simply as the Methodist church at Galena. It, in turn, may have taken the name Olivet as a play on words from the nearby Oliver's Hill.

An attempt to trace the title of the presumed mine property was made and finally given up when property descriptions were no longer clear and the researcher was no longer sure of what property was being traced. However, at least some of the Olivet Hill plateau, the high ground between the two headwater branches of Mill Creek seems to have belonged to free blacks quite early in the nineteenth century. It is said by present Olivet Hill residents that one of the Galena white families, the Scotts (perhaps Dr. Edward or Cornelius J.), was responsible for the black acquisition of property in Olivet Hill, by giving some to worthy one-time slaves, but no evidence of this was found. However, Olivet Hill is one of the county's oldest black communities and an area where blacks owned property before the Civil War. It continues today as a cohesive community, most of its residents the descendants of several early families and related to each other in some way. (See reports for K-364, Olivet Hill Methodist Church, and K-586, Olivet Hill School.) The present owner of the tract is a descendant of one of its apparent early owners (Thomas Peaker), though ownership was not continued uninterrupted within the family.

What is certain is that the 5+ acre tract was owned by Thomas Peaker at the time of his death. A 1914 deed (JTD 32/277) describes the property as the "residue of the property that was devised by Thomas Peaker to his descendants." Between Thomas Peaker's death in the 1870s and the 1914 deed, it evidently had been passed down in his family. The 1873 will (probated in 1876) of Thomas Peaker distributes a considerable amount of land to his children and other family members. His name was misspelled Peaca in the will, also misspelled Paca in some deeds; Peaker was illiterate, making his mark, but his descendants assert that the name was Peaker, evidently mis-transcribed from accented pronunciation by the person writing the documents. It is not clear, however, exactly which of the willed properties included the presumed mine property. One of his legacies was indeed referred to as the residue of his estate, "both Real and personal." However, there was no description. Several of them were noted as being near the property (farm) of C. J. Scott. All but one of the properties listed were in what became known as the Olivet Hill community.

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An attempt was made to discover how Thomas Peaker acquired his property. In the 1842-1883 index to the county land records he is listed as a party to five transactions, during the years 1851 through 1869. The last, in 1869, was a sale, to the Kent County Railroad, but its location could not be ascertained, though the railroad subsequently ran nowhere near Olivet Hill. It may have been in the Massey or Golts area. What is confusing about some of the deeds is that they are stated to be for land in the third district, and Olivet Hill is in the first district, though the districts may have been altered. By 1877 Olivet Hill was well within the first district. Otherwise, given adjacent owners, they seem to be for Olivet Hill property. In 1851 Isaac Brown sold for \$76 to Thomas Paca 15+ acres (JR 1/519). Both were noted as "free Negroes," indicating even earlier black ownership in Olivet Hill. In 1858 Peaker for \$55 bought 10+ more acres from Isaac Brown (JKH 1/65). On the same day Peaker bought one-quarter acre from George Rasin, also a "free Negro," for \$5 (JKH 1/58). In 1866 Isaac Brown sold Peaker 8 more acres for \$160 (JKH 5/298).

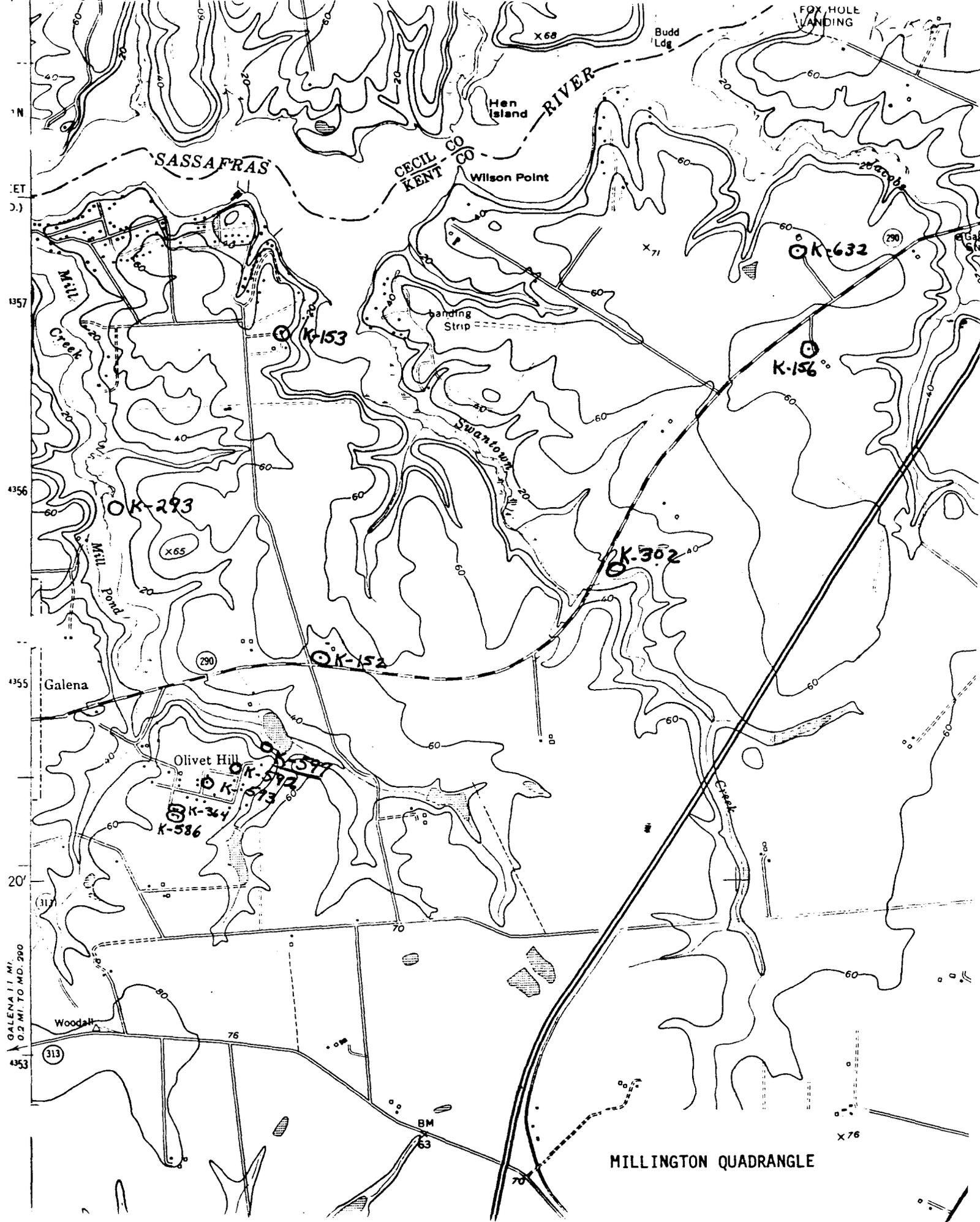
If not at this point furthering the title search for the old mine property, the above show that in antebellum Kent County there was substantial ownership of property among free blacks. Further research should be done on this community, which like the other county black communities has been little studied.

A current resident of Galena, Mrs. Warren Gillespie, is said to have inherited (evidently through the Ruth family) some silver spoons that were made in Philadelphia from silver mined at Galena, possibly substantiating the account by Mrs. Nickle in Usilton's book. The owner of the mine property at the time Usilton wrote his book seems to have been interviewed by him. She appears to have been aware that she owned property on which an old mine was located, but unfortunately he does not give her name. Locally the name used for the silver supposedly found in the ore at this mine is horn silver, but it is not known if this information is simply derived from Usilton's account. Chemically, horn silver (Hornsilber, from the German) is silver chloride, or chlorargyrite.

When Galena was incorporated and named Galena in 1860 (it had earlier most often used the name Georgetown Crossroads, but also Down's Crossroads and briefly Colchester), the name is said to have been chosen because of the one-time nearby silver mine. Since this was less than 50 years after the supposed mine's operation, it is likely to be accurate. According to Miss Ella May Hicks, a longtime resident of Galena, one of her grandfathers, William Whitaker, had come from Galena, Illinois to settle in Georgetown Crossroads (he had family in Delaware) and suggested the name because of similarities in the mining operations in the two locations. Galena, Illinois, was noted for its rich sulfide of lead deposits yielding silver that had been mined by the Indians by 1700; there was a mining boom there in the 1820s and for some years thereafter. (Encyclopedia Britannica) In fact, it is now not known what the base metal associated with this supposed silver mine might have been--lead, copper or zinc. The first and the last are more likely than the second. There has been no local discussion of just where the mine ore might have been refined. Unfortunately, Usilton does not indicate just who Professor Rumsell was or what his credentials were.

9.1 Continuation Page

Frederick G. Usilton, History of Kent County, Maryland, 1630-1916,
with Additional 54 Chapters of the History of Kent County, Maryland,
1628-1980, by William B. Usilton, III. Chestertown, MD: Perry Publications
1980.



SASSAFRAS

CECIL CO
KENT CO

RIVER

FOX HOLE
LANDING

Hen
Island

Wilson Point

Budd
Ldg

1° N

76° 30' W

357

356

355

20

GALENA 11 MI.
0.2 MI. TO MD. 290

313

Olivet Hill

Woodall

BM
63

X 76

MILLINGTON QUADRANGLE