The Origins of Hurstleigh

By Joseph M. Coale

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Greater Ruxton is made up of unique individual neighborhoods. Most have an interesting past with historic connections to productive and prominent citizens. The area on the southwest corner of Charles Street and Bellona Avenue is known to current residents as Hurstleigh. Bounded by Woodbrook Lane on the south, Charles Street on the east, Bellona Avenue to the north and Betty Bush Lane and the Tyrconnell estate on the west, this area consists of about 100 acres. Many fine homes graciously adorned with mature plantings, varied topography, spacious lots and eclectic architectural styles make for a most pleasant residential area with a proud past.

The record shows this land was originally part of a 500-acre parcel granted to a Morgan Murray by the Proprietor's Land Office in 1694 and was known as *Morgan's Delight.* It was a rectangular grant that extended down to Lake Avenue and included all of the Elkridge Club property. Its northern fringe, along what is now Bellona Avenue, was also the southernmost boundary of Samuel's Hope, a grant of equal size. Samuel's Hope stretched westward over to what is now Lake Roland, north to Dunlora Road and then eastward to the GBMC property encompassing the area we know as Ruxton.

Subdivision of Morgan's Delight began when Benjamin Bowen sought to enlarge his plantation. In 1754 he purchased 110 acres of Morgan's Delight contiguous to Samuel's Hope (BB No. J folio 252). At his death in 1770, the property was willed to his son, Josais, who is shown still owning the property in the 1804 Assessment. It is this portion that contains the Hurstleigh we know today.

After a series of further transfers we find that by 1877 there were three parcels considered now to be the Hurstleigh community: one owned by Thomas M. Keerl along Charles Street, a second owned by C.M. Betts to the east of Betty Bush Lane and, finally, Samuel Bevan's land and manor house 'Glendon' on Perot Lane (Woodbrook Lane).

Mr. Bevan died in 1881 and his 'country seat' was put up for auction with a descriptive sales notice in the newspaper. This gives us an idea of what a prosperous Baltimorean enjoyed as a country home.

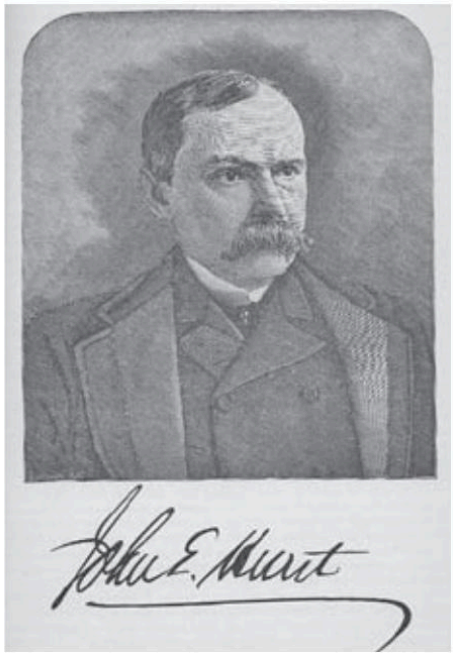
> "The desirable COUNTRY SEAT, known as "GLENDON" formerly owned by Benj. W. Jenkins, Esq. containing 25 acres situated on Perot's Avenue, a short distance west of Charles-Street Avenue, 4 1/2 miles from the city and immediately opposite the attractive residence of Wm. Perot Esq. This property is only a few minutes' drive from the Northern Central Railroad but a few minutes' walk from the Baltimore and Delta Narrow-Gauge Railroad. Fine shady lawn, with forest growth, abundance of pure cold spring water, fruit, kitchen garden with growing vegetables, ice house filled, etc. The

improvements consist of a large handsome FRAME MANSION, containing about 16 rooms, in good order, supplied by ram with pure spring water; also has hot and cold bath etc. A neat FRAME COTTAGE or Porter's Lodge at the entrance gate, Stone Dairy, commodious Stables and Carriage House, Ice House, Poultry House, etc. Ready for immediate occupancy……." (*Baltimore Sun* 4/29/1881)

By 1898 prominent Baltimore business and civic leader John E. Hurst had acquired all three parcels including the handsome country residence he renamed, as was his prerogative, Hurstleigh. During the winter he lived in the City at 416 Eutaw Place.

John Edward Hurst was born on a farm in Dorchester County in 1832. In 1849 he came to Baltimore and received apprentice training in banking and wholesale dry goods. By 1856 he had joined his distantly-related family firm of Hurst & Co. and by 1868 had become its managing partner. During the course of his career, Mr. Hurst is mentioned many times in the Baltimore Sun for his various business, social and political activities. He was a local civic leader of high ethical standards and was deeply respected throughout the community.

In an ironic twist of fate, Mr. Hurst died exactly one month before the Baltimore Fire (February 6, 1904), which unfortunately started in the basement of his building in Hopkins Plaza. Being the responsible and committed civic leader he was, we can only imagine the burden of guilt he would have carried had he lived to witness that tragic event.



John E. Hurst, prominent late 19th century businessman and civic leader Photo courtesy Joseph M. Coale

Joseph M. Coale is the author of *Middling Planters of Ruxton 1694-1850*, a book published by The Maryland Historical Society.