



Georgia Avenue at University Boulevard – 1947  
(formerly Old Bladensburg Road)

**W**heaton is an unincorporated community in Montgomery County that started out as a crossroads in the 1700s. The area has no official governmental body, and all governmental functions are handled by agencies of the County.



General Frank Wheaton

Wheaton was named after the Union General Frank Wheaton, who defended nearby Fort Stevens and Washington, DC in the Civil War against Confederate General Jubal Early's attack in July 1864. As a result of the battle Gen. Wheaton became a folk hero, and the post office was named in his honor by the area's first postmaster, George F. Plyer in October 1869.

Plyer had been a Union soldier in Gen. Wheaton's troops and had fought in the Battle of Ft. Stevens. As a Private in 1861 of K Company 36th Infantry (NY), George Plyer and his unit came to the Nation's Capital, and when he was mustered out of the service he returned to the area along with his friend and fellow soldier Col. Eccleston.

Col. Eccleston was an influential citizen and personal friend of Gen. Wheaton, as well as the husband of Martha Brown, whose family owned two thousand acres stretching from Georgia Ave. as far west as Rock Creek. This land originally belonged to the Carroll family and was named Balamona after the Carroll holding in Ireland. There was a frame house at the SW corner of Veirs Mill Rd. and Georgia Ave. which was part of the Eccleston/Brown farm and is

now the location of the First Baptist Church of Wheaton. The original farmhouse was the congregation's first church building.

The greater part of Wheaton's European settlement started with two tracts of land east of Rock Creek patented by Col. William Joseph in 1689; the 3,860 acres called Hermitage; and parts of Joseph's Park tract of 4,220 acres. Col. Joseph's son sold it in 1705, when the area was still in Prince George's County. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, the area was home to the native Piscataway.

In 1797, Robert Brown, who arrived in 1761 from Ireland, purchased part of the Hermitage tract. He was a skilled stonemason who worked on both the White House and the Capitol. His son, also named Robert Brown, continued to add to the holdings, purchasing large portions of Wheaton and Kensington south to Forest Glen, and from Georgia Ave. west to Rock Creek. As Robert Brown's children married, the land was divided among them, their spouses and their children.

At the cross section of three roads that cut through the farmland, a small business area developed. The north/south Brookeville Pike (now Rt. 97 Georgia Ave.) was a toll road from Washington DC north to Brookeville, and Baltimore, that was improved with gravel, stone and oyster shells. Veirs Mill Rd. (now Rt. 586) was a coach road with sections of plank road (split logs laid side-by-side) from Wheaton to Rockville, leading to ferry crossings on the Potomac connecting with Northern Virginia. The third road was Old Bladensburg Rd. (now Rt. 193 University Blvd.) that connected the communities of Georgetown, Bethesda, Chevy Chase and Bladensburg.

# discover wheaton



Wheaton Plaza Merchants Assn.  
Wheaton Boys Club 1975



Two scenes, of Veirs Mill Road, 31 years apart  
Left photo: 1937 Right photo: 1967

Leesborough was the first recorded name for the area, as listed in 1826 Post Office records. In the 1860s, it became known as Mitchell's Crossroads, referring to Mitchell's Tavern located at the NE corner of Union Turnpike (Georgia Ave.) and Old Bladensburg Rd. (University Blvd.). The tavern was reported to have been well over a hundred years old in 1865, and stood until it was destroyed by fire in 1940. G.O.B. Cissel of Howard County built a store on Old Bladensburg Rd. that later became H. C. Hickerson's General Merchandise Store. In the 1920s, McKeevers Ice Cream Parlor was built on the NW corner of Georgia Ave. and University Blvd. – the future site of the popular Anchor Inn, which closed in 2005. This corner now has a variety of recently built restaurants and stores. The triangle formed by the intersection of the three main roadways remains at the heart of Wheaton's Central Business District.

The first U.S. television license W3XK (1928) operated out of Charles Francis Jenkins' home in Wheaton on the corner of Windham Lane and Georgia Ave. As the highest point above sea level in the greater Washington area, Wheaton became the birthplace of the first television transmissions from Jenkins Broadcasting and the home for the transmitters of WTOP, WGAY/WQMR and WDON/WASH. Along with their transmission towers, the stations also had broadcasting studios (except for WTOP) in Wheaton.

After WWII, a massive influx of Federal government workers moved to the metropolitan area. Prior to 1947 only 29,000 people were living in Wheaton, mostly on farms and large estates. This number multiplied in the 1950s, creating unprecedented growth. To accommodate traffic congestion, Georgia Avenue, the "Avenue of Progress" was widened from two lanes to six with a dedication on November 1, 1952 by Governor Theodore McKeldin.

In 1954 building began on Kemp Mill Estates of the Heitmuller tract, which opened in 1959 as Wheaton Plaza Shopping Center. At that time it was the 6th largest in the nation, and has since had major re-development as Westfield Wheaton.

In 1958 the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission began buying land to create Wheaton Regional Park, now a 536 acre sanctuary.

Wheaton and many other communities in the county had their identity absorbed into the large Silver Spring postal designation. Unhappy with this loss of identity, community residents and the Wheaton & Kensington Chamber of Commerce in 1965 gained

permission for residents to use "Wheaton, MD" for zip codes 20902



The inventor of the first home television set, C. Francis Jenkins, photographed with the transmitter which he developed at this Wheaton residence for broadcasting radio moves.

# discover wheaton



Aerial view of Wheaton 1952

and 20906, believing that a community identity would insure needed services, funds and planning for the area.

The Washington, DC area Metro subway that opened in 1976 grew and extended service to Wheaton, opening on September 22, 1990. It was the north-eastern end of the Red Line for nearly eight years, until the Glenmont station opened in July 1998. The Wheaton station features the longest set of single-span escalators in the Western Hemisphere, at a length of 508 ft. Another architectural feature

of this station is separate tunnels and platforms for each direction, instead of the large, vaulted common room seen at most other underground stations in the Metro system. This design, which is similar to many of the London Underground's tube stations, was used to save money due to the station's depth. Forest Glen (the deepest station in the Metro system) is the only other Washington Metro station to have this design.

Wheaton's strategic location - a Central Business District transected by major roadways; a Red Line Metro stop and Bus Transit Center has made Wheaton a transportation hub, creating opportunity for increased density through mixed-use development. The diversity of the community is reflected by the high concentration of various ethnic restaurants located in this historic crossroads.



Wheaton Shopping Center 1992



Aerial view of Wheaton 1969



Anchor Inn 1992

*\* Thank you to Marian Fryer, Laura-Leigh Palmer and the Wheaton Chamber of Commerce for sharing their historical research for the articles and use of photos.*