

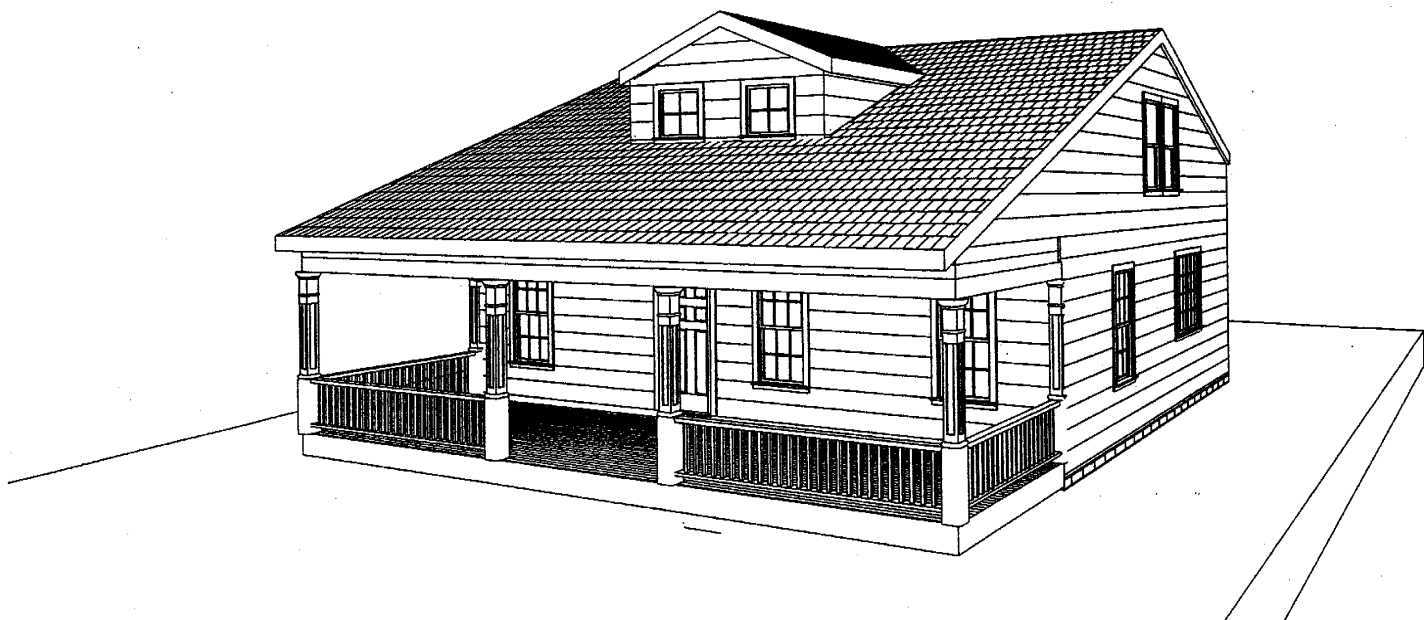
# Maryland Historical Trust Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

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**Figure 8. Conjectural view of original bungalow as it may have appeared in 1916-1919. Drawing by Dean Brenneman, copyright 2004 by Brenneman & Pagenstecher, Inc.**

# 8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____

**Specific dates** 1916, 1921-1997 **Architect/Builder** Unknown

**Construction dates** Original 1916-1921; Additions 1925; Additions late 1930's

Evaluation for:  
 National Register       Maryland Register       not evaluated

**Summary:**

The Sycamore Store is a local landmark and a reminder of a time before supermarkets and shopping centers, when neighborhood grocery stores were gathering places and the hub of a community. The Sycamore Store served this purpose continuously for 75 years, from its inception in 1919 or 1921 until closing permanently in 1995. In a broader sense, the Sycamore store represents the last vestige of a once predominantly commercial intersection, which was pivotal in the early development of the Glen Echo area. From 1891 to 1995 a store was continuously operated at three sequential locations on this intersection; early references to the intersection as Sycamore Junction attest to its connection with both the adjacent Sycamore Island Club of 1885 and the Glen Echo Electric Railway of 1891. The subject building is the third store to operate at this intersection and was most likely built between 1916 and 1921 by Thomas Boswell as a residence while he was operating his "Boswell Store" across the street on the north side of Walhonding Road. Extensive physical research indicates that the Sycamore Store building was originally a bungalow and later converted to use as a store; probably after being purchased by Hugh and Mary Johnston in 1921. This resource's Architectural and Commercial significance derives from being a fairly rare building type (that of a bungalow adapted to serve as a neighborhood grocery in the early twentieth century) as well as from its locational association with early commercial development in the area. The resource's Transportation and Entertainment significance derives from its association with the trolley lines that fostered the development of the Glen Echo Chautauqua/Amusement Park and surrounding residential communities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Taken together, all of these elements represent a significant aspect of Social History.

**Narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context:**

From 1891 to 1896 this intersection marked the western terminus of the Glen Echo Electric Railway (GEER) built by twin brothers Edwin and Edward Baltzley to draw people, from friendship heights and later from Chevy Chase Circle, to their new developments of Glen Echo, Glen Echo Heights, the National Chautauqua (later Glen Echo Amusement Park), the nearby 30,000 square foot Pa-taw-o-meck cafe and the planned Monican hotel. Opposite the future Sycamore Store site, on the north side of Walhonding Road at about the same time, the Baltzley's built two commercial structures. One was a large stone car-barn and powerhouse with tall smokestack serving the GEER and the other a store to serve the nascent development.

Originally this intersection was known as Sycamore Junction, and from the trolley stop here, people were transported by carriage to the nearby Glen Echo Chautauqua or by foot to nearby Sycamore Island, from which the name derived. The Sycamore Island Club was founded in 1885 as a private club for outdoor enthusiasts. The club continues today and has a very active membership dedicated to enjoying and preserving the natural wonders of the Potomac Palisades. The Sycamore Island Club was perhaps the first establishment to recognize the beauty of this area. Their annual regatta of canoes, rafts and anything that floats, remains a cherished local tradition. From it's inception up until present day, the history of the Sycamore Store has been closely entwined with that of the Sycamore Island club; Hugh Johnston was Captain of the Sycamore Island Club before founding the Sycamore Store, and George and Louise Rogers' son George, jr. was a caretaker of the Island for a few summers. George Rogers, Sr. fondly recalls the days before the Clara Barton Parkway was built, when he lived in a house across Conduit road from the Sycamore store, on the hillside between the trolley tracks and the Canal. He somewhat less fondly recalls the interminably long flight of steps on which he carried provisions from the store, down to the riverbanks for transfer, by ferry, to the Island. A simple raft-like ferry, pulled by hand across the river shallows, remains the only access to Sycamore Island. Go to the riverbank and pull on the rope that

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goes across the shallows to a bell on a pole in the yard, and the caretaker will appear and fetch you across. And today's caretaker of Sycamore Island is still connected with the Sycamore Store; along with his two daughters, Joe Hage maintains the landscape around the Store and keeps an eye on it while it is uninhabited.

Once the trolley line was extended to Glen Echo and beyond, this intersection became known as the Sycamore Stop. The Baltzleys hoped to seize upon the natural splendor of the Potomac Palisades and envisioned an "American Rhine" with castles and substantial homes overlooking the river gorge. Much like the competing new railroad suburbs of Takoma Park and Rockville, the Baltzleys believed that bringing a railroad to this location would guarantee a rush of purchasers and visitors anxious to escape the heat and malaria of Washington, D.C.

According to William Offutt's *BETHESDA, a Social History*, the Baltzley's ambition was stifled by rumors of malaria and in 1903 the bank foreclosed. Edward Baltzley went west to seek a new fortune in the gold and silver fields and died of mercury poisoning in 1907. Edwin Stayed in the area for a time but was no longer active in the development of the community. He died in New Jersey in 1919. Even by the fall of 1900, the competing Western Washington and Great Falls railroad (operating next to the right of way of the Conduit Road from Georgetown to Cabin John) rendered the GEER obsolete and its right-of-way was subsequently abandoned. In 1914, Land records indicate that the powerhouse<sup>1</sup> and Store Property<sup>2</sup> were both sold to Franklin T. Boswell, an entrepreneur who also acquired other parcels of land in the area including Chautauqua Island and Cabin John Island. The 1914 Deed of Transfer of the Store Property, from the heirs of Edward Baltzley to Franklin Boswell, clearly affirms the presence of the store begun by Mr. Baltzley and operated by a Mr. James D. Riley (then deceased). At the time of the deed of transfer, the store is noted as being "in the occupancy and possession of the said Franklin T. Boswell". In 1919, land records show Boswell paying off a loan against the "Boswell Store Property" and notes Boswell as residing there<sup>3</sup>. In 1922, land records also indicate Boswell selling the Boswell Store Property to a group of investors<sup>4</sup>. Further investigation is required to determine when the Boswell Store was demolished and the site converted to a stone quarry, but it seems likely that it was at this time, since we know that Hugh Johnston began operations of the Sycamore store sometime between 1919 and 1921.

Boswell eventually expanded the store and moved it into the abandoned powerhouse. In 1916 the land records indicate that Mr. Boswell purchased the lot across the street (the future site of the Sycamore Store). This lot was originally part of the larger tract of land acquired by Edwin and Edward Baltzley in 1888 and subsequently subdivided as Glen Echo Heights. The Baltzleys first conveyed Lot 32, Block 2 in August of 1891 to Susan M. Crea of Washington, DC for \$2,200 with a covenant that she erect a "substantial brick, stone, or metal dwelling house". Despite the covenant, Ms. Crea apparently never built upon the lot and on April 13, 1914 the county sold it to John W. & Annie C. Hall for \$67 in unpaid taxes. On May 6, 1916 the Halls sold the property to Franklin and Rebecca Boswell. It is uncertain if Boswell built the first building on this lot, and the fact that the land records indicate that he was residing across the street at the site of the Boswell Store Property in 1919 sheds no further light on the subject.

Land Records show that Hugh and Mary Johnston purchased the Sycamore store property from Franklin and Rebecca Boswell on Jan 25, 1921. The purchase price is unknown, but Tax records indicate that in 1921 the lot was valued at \$100 and supported improvements valued at \$2,200, thereby establishing that the building was extant no later

<sup>1</sup> Montgomery County Land Records Liber 242, Folio 21-23

<sup>2</sup> Montgomery County Land Records Liber 240, Folio 348-349

<sup>3</sup> Montgomery County Land Records Liber 279, Folio 81

<sup>4</sup> Montgomery County Land Records Liber 318, Folio 20

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than 1921. Records of the Sycamore Island Club indicate that Hugh Johnston resigned his position as Captain of the island in 1919 and wished him well in his "new venture". This suggests that Boswell may have built the Sycamore Store building and that Johnston may have begun operations there in 1919, prior to purchasing the property in 1921. **The best estimation therefore for the construction of the earliest portion of the Sycamore Store is no earlier than Boswell's purchase of the land in 1916 and no later than Johnston's purchase in 1921. A strong case can be made that Boswell erected the building as a residence in 1916 and that Johnston converted it to a store in 1919.**

Tax records also indicate that an addition valued at \$900 was present in 1925. Land records of that year also indicate that a Philip B. Schladt was added to the deed in 1925 – presumably as a result of a loan for the additions. Mr. Schladt was subsequently removed from the deed in 1928 and his heirs were removed by force of a lawsuit in 1945. Mr. Johnston operated the store continuously until selling it on November 5, 1953 to George H. and Louise M. Rogers. Mr. Rogers began at the store as a stock boy in 1935 and, with the exception of a tour of duty during WWII, worked there until his retirement in 1995. He always said it was the only job he ever had. Mr. Rogers recalls that the last of the renovations/additions to the building were completed in the late 1930's by the firm of Johnson Emory & Woods.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Montgomery County Land Records

State of Maryland Tax Assesment Records, Hall of Records, Annapolis Maryland

William Offutt's *BETHESDA – A Social History*, 1996

Oral interviews with George Rogers, 2004 by Dean K. Brenneman, AIA

"The Sycamore Store" by Sherry Pettie, *Sycamore Islander*, October 1999

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of surveyed property 6873 square feet

Acreage of historical setting 6873 square feet

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle scale: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The subject property is bounded on the West by MacArthur Boulevard (formerly Conduit Road) and on the North by Walhonding Road. It is bounded on the East by a remainder of the original lot, and on the South by Lot 33, block 2 of Glen Echo Heights which, combined with Lots 34 & 35, currently supports a single-family dwelling

The property line fronting on MacArthur Boulevard sits virtually upon the face of the building as a result of the additions made to the front of the building, to expand the store in 1925. Likewise, these additions have brought the corner of the structure almost to the Walhonding Road property line. This is characteristic of commercial enterprises of the time and differentiates it from the adjoining residential area.

The subject property represents approximately ½ of the original lot for this building. The remainder of the lot was subdivided, sold, and subsequently developed with a single-family residence in the 1960's. The line of subdivision was established at a steep slope that naturally divided the original parcel into two discrete areas; a western area at the lower elevation of the busy intersection of Conduit and Walhonding roads, and an eastern area at the 30' higher elevation of the adjoining residences of Glen Echo Heights.

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## 11. Form Prepared by

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name/title	Dean K. Brenneman, A.I.A.*		
organization	Brenneman & Pagenstecher, Inc.	date	10/22/04
street & number	10605 Concord Street, Suite 1	telephone	301.933.9305
city or town	Kensington	state	Maryland 20895

\* Assistance in historical records research was provided by Loretta Watson of Brenneman & Pagenstecher, Inc.

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

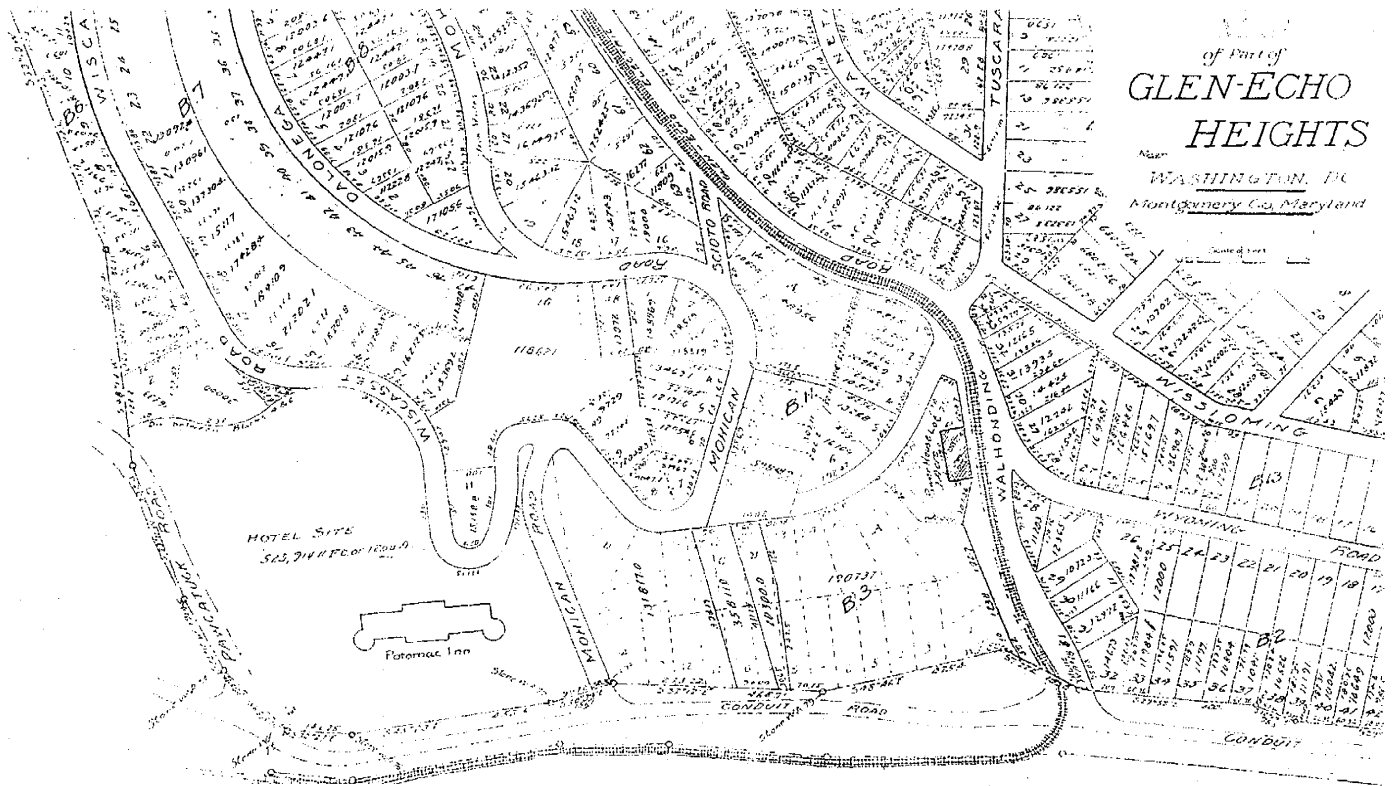
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Crownsville, MD 21032-2023  
410-514-7600

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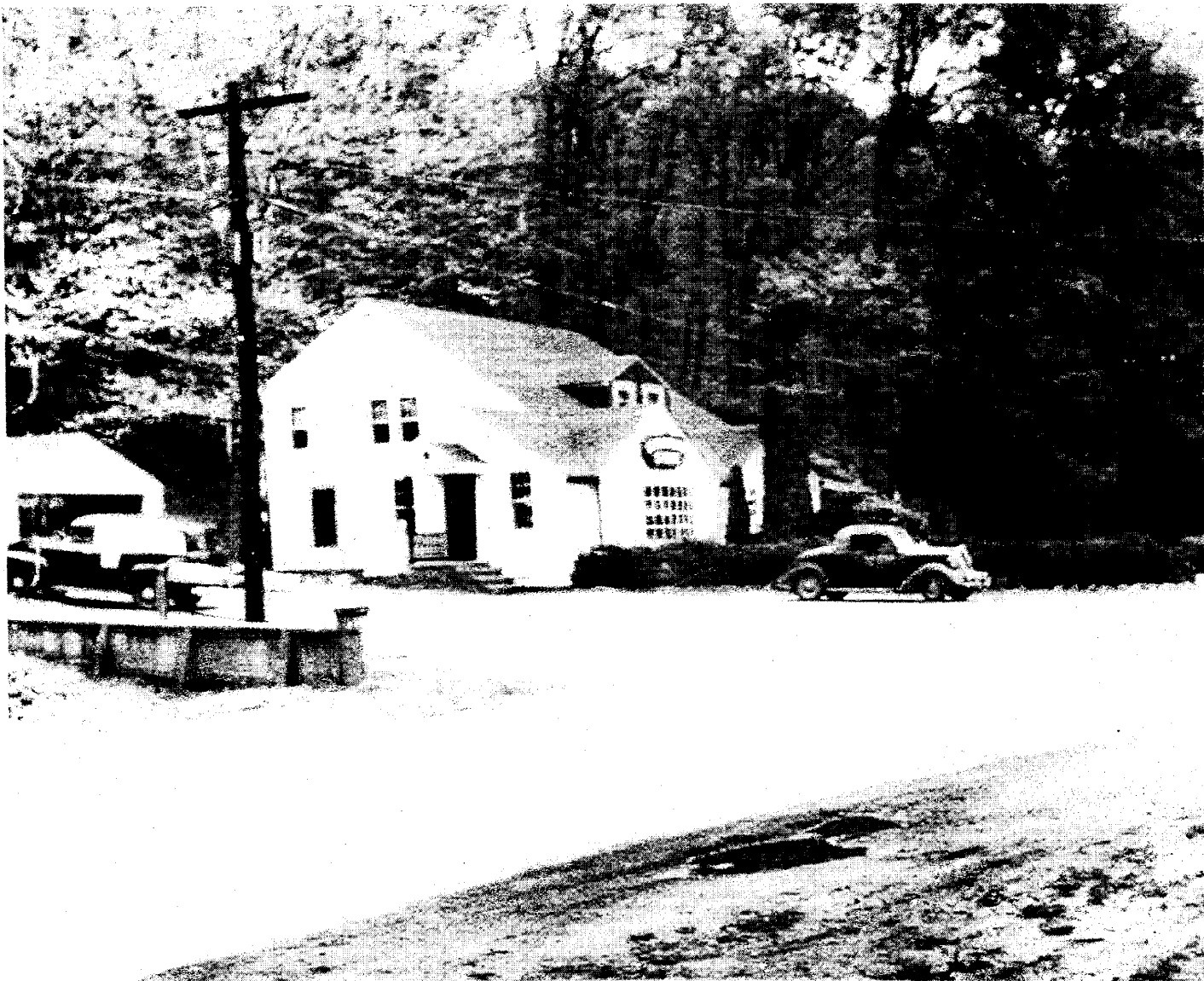
**Figure 9.** This is a composite of portions of three maps of the subdivision of Glen Echo Heights, drawn by Henry B. Looker in February 1892. Note the Glen Echo Electric Railroad on Walhonding Road as well as the Car barn/Powerhouse and the proposed hotel site. The un-built section of Tuscarawus Road (on the north side of Walhonding Road, just behind the power house) shows up in later plats as Quarry Road. This is the author's basis for proposing that the large ravine in this area may be the result of quarrying activities, but more research on this subject is needed to verify it. Original maps from the land records of Montgomery County Maryland; merged by Jason Gagen at Brenneman & Pagenstecher, Inc. 2004

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**Figure 10. The Sycamore Store in the 1950's. Note the Sycamore Store delivery truck at far left. Photo, courtesy of the Rogers Family.**