Introductions to Joseph L. Arnold's History of Baltimore

How did Baltimore grow from a tiny hamlet in 1730 to the third most populous city in the nation in 1800? Joseph Arnold answers this question in the opening chapter of his sweeping account of two hundred years of Baltimore history. Arnold convincingly argues that Baltimore's success was not due to one charismatic individual who had a compelling vision or to an enthusiastic band of boosters who charted a pragmatic plan for economic growth. Rather, Arnold shows readers that the town's success as a speculative settlement was birthed almost by the land itself. Arnold paints a picture of the gradual elevations that surrounded the harbor on the Chesapeake Bay, which seemed to provide an efficient route for tobacco rolling roads. When farmers exported their cured leaves to Europe in the 1730s and 1740s, Baltimore jostled for their business with many other tobacco landings along the basin. Arnold demonstrates the advantages of Baltimore's location in the critical 1750s, when many nearby farmers switched to wheat as a cash crop. The swift streams that flowed into the harbor provided waterpower for grain mills, a crucial piece of the flour supply chain that demanded that farmers process cereal grains before they shipped them. In his comparisons to other fledgling towns in the Mid-Atlantic, Arnold points out that in the Baltimore region farmers could operate most efficiently. They grew their crops in the hinterland, hauled them to Baltimore for milling and then put their sacks of flour on ships that sailed directly to the West Indies and western Europe. The hills, streams and harbor seemed custom made for the profitable flour trade, and by 1776, Baltimore Town had grown into the sixth largest port in the colonies.
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Elizabeth, Youle (2015-05-07)  
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