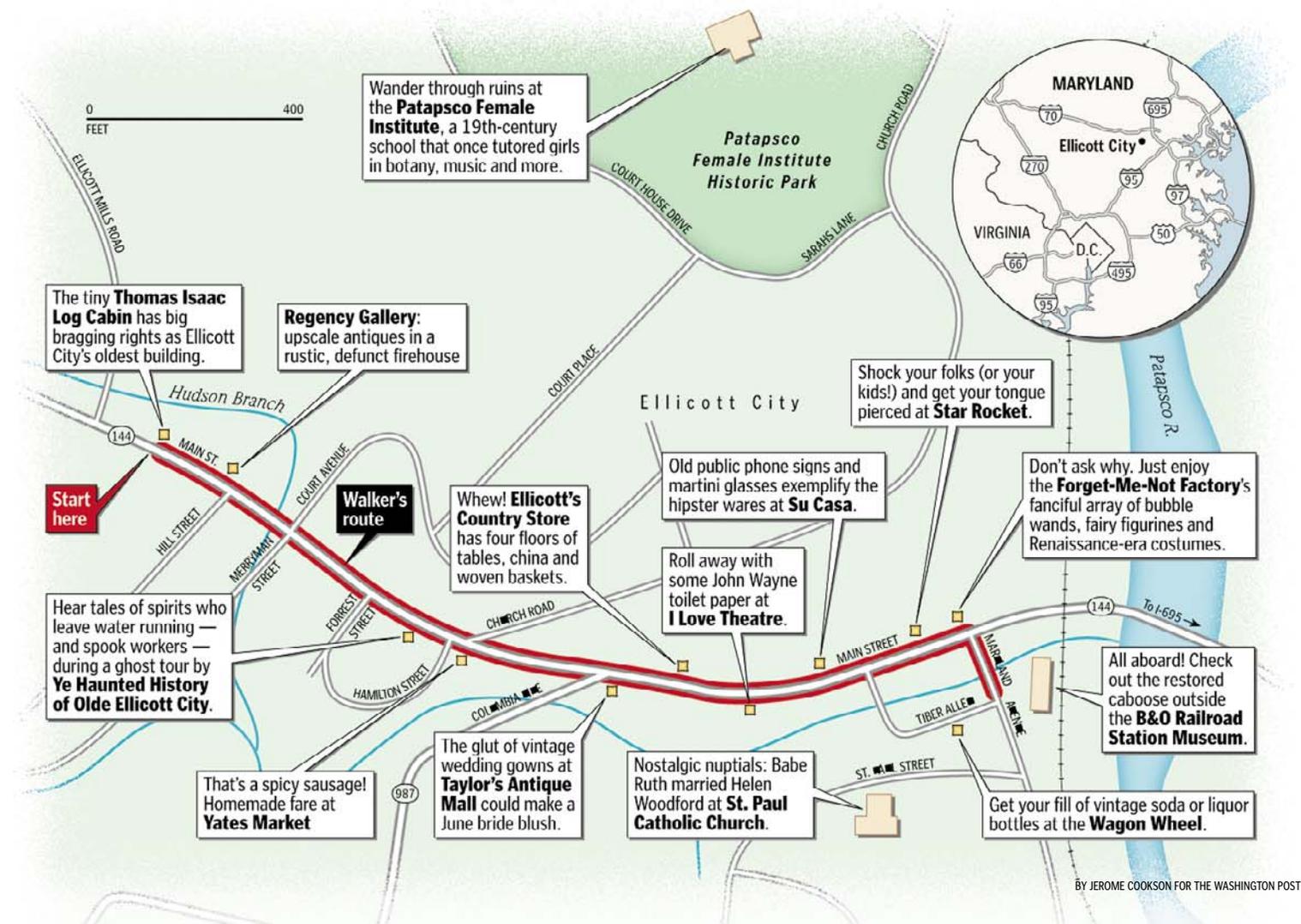


ROADTRIP | Historic Ellicott City



BY JEROME COOKSON FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

WHERE: Historic Ellicott City.

WHY: Spooky stories, antiques galore and the oldest train station in the country.

HOW FAR: 33 miles or 45 minutes from the District.

For adventurous travelers, the omnipresent cookie-cutter chain stores sometimes seem like a spreading plague that's hard to avoid. For a quick detox, tool over to historic Ellicott City, where mom 'n' pop shops are the rule, not the exception. The town was established in 1772 and, as such, boasts a Norman Rockwell-esque Main Street lined with businesses that are both ruggedly individualistic and defiantly bohemian. So you'll find a yuppie home decor store like Su Casa within steps of the fantasy-themed boutique Forget-Me-Not Factory — which itself sits across

from the country's oldest railroad terminus, the B&O Railroad Station. The gray stone buildings that line narrow Main Street probably don't look that different than when proto-Americans hung out there, making the place a fave hangout for local shutterbugs. (Say cheese!)

Need a guided excursion? Take a ghost tour, where you'll spend an eerie evening hearing about spirits who appear on surveillance monitors or track footprints across newly varnished floors. Gulp! Scaredy-cats who prefer daylight sightseeing should check out the vases and old frying pans at the Wagon Wheel before sundown (at night the creaky wheels on an old-time funeral wagon inexplicably have been heard turning). The historic district's trademark are the countless antiques shops overflowing with objects that run the gamut from Renaissance-inspired statues (Regency Gallery) to rustic dining room sets (Ellicott's Country Store).

What's in a name? The souvenir shop I Love Theatre pushes the boundaries of its moniker by stocking sports knickknacks like Orioles tees and University of Maryland Terrapins mugs alongside artsy items like Betty Boop clocks and refrigerator magnets from the Broadway musical "Wicked." If you venture off Main Street and up the hilly back roads, you can explore the imposing ruins of the Patapsco Female Institute. The site is used these days for archaeological digs and as a stage for the Chesapeake Shakespeare Company, which produces al fresco "Shakespeare in the Ruins" shows annually. (Well, the Bard did say "All the world's a stage.") — **Tony Sclafani**

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