

## PREFACE

With the possible exception of New England, no part of the United States features as many historically significant points in as compact a space as the mid-Atlantic region. Southern and midwestern sites, for all their grandeur, are often dispersed across far greater distances. The richness of this midregion's historical geography is a catalog of the momentous decisions and conflicts that have shaped our nation, and they range from southern Virginia to Pennsylvania. Each has become defined by events that over time have bestowed a lasting historical identity: Valley Forge as symbol of the American Revolution; Fort McHenry as bulwark against the assault on Baltimore during the War of 1812; Gettysburg as the genesis of a national reconciliation that began even before the end of the Civil War. Others, such as the multidimensional Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and Harpers Ferry, span the centuries of American history. Because the region is rich in Civil War history, the book features many destinations from that conflict, but the area offers a wide variety that begins with the colonial era.

Long-standing interest in our nation's history has drawn me to the historical landscape of my native region. Some places I visited on school field trips. I developed a passing acquaintance with others, often on weekend pilgrimages with our children. In the 1990s I wrote travel stories on a number of sites for the Sunday feature section of the *Baltimore Sun*, an endeavor that led to deeper exploration of historical attractions that families could enjoy over the course of a two- or three-day weekend. In 2007 I published *Maryland Voices of the Civil War* (also with Johns Hopkins University Press), a thematic collection of letters, diaries, and other contemporary accounts of Marylanders grappling with the profound issues of the Civil War in a loyal slave state on the border. The twelve years devoted to that work further stoked my interest in the significance of historical places and their rich stories—of the sites themselves and the people, famous and unknown, who shaped those stories.

Bookstore shelves teem with travel books and guides to such destinations. Few, however, offer much historical depth, tending more toward sightseeing while lacking context; and even fewer address the mid-Atlantic region from this perspective. Indeed, one finds regional road