

VOLUME 1 ■ ISSUE 1 ■ AUGUST 2008

HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD

A Neighborhood Newsletter

by Mitchell Edmondson

What you are holding in your hands is the first edition of what we hope will become the regular monthly Belle Grove Square neighborhood newsletter. As you already know, we live in a very special place in Westminster. Our neighborhood has played a role in the development of the city and continues to be a proud neighborhood with citizens who care about our community and about keeping up our historic neighborhood. As studies have shown, property values in historic areas rise faster and maintain their value better than other neighborhoods.

In the coming months, we are hoping to organize a group of like-minded residents who want to work to preserve and improve Belle Grove Square's historic charm for present and future generations. Several residents of our neighborhood have gotten together and drafted some of what's included in this newsletter to help the group get started based on some initial feedback from interested neighbors. As we try to get more organized we would like very much to receive feedback from everyone in our neighborhood.

As we try to become one of Westminster's first organized neighborhood associations, it is important that everyone has a chance to have their voices heard. To that end, most of this month's newsletter is devoted to a neighborhood survey that will help guide us as we try to get organized. Please fill it out and return it in the attached envelope by August 10 and we'll include a summary of the results in the next newsletter - we greatly appreciate it!

continued on page 2...

What's Inside:

A NEIGHBORHOOD NEWSLETTER
PAGE 1

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR
PAGE 2

REMEMBERING THE RAILROAD STATION
PAGE 4

WOMAN'S CLUB OF WESTMINSTER
PAGE 5

HISTORY OF BELLE GROVE SQUARE
PAGE 6

A FORMER MAYOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE SQUARE
PAGE 8

HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD



Meetings

Our group hopes to start meeting in September at St Paul's United Church of Christ (which has graciously offered us meeting space) or at one of our homes. All residents are invited and encouraged to attend. The date of the meeting will be announced in the September newsletter as we see when will work best for everyone.

Our Goals

To help restore and preserve the area from Union Alley (between Main Street and Green street), Cole alley on the north, Chase street between Bond and Park Avenue, and the alley behind Park Avenue ("Myers alley"). Our goal is to establish a neighborhood association to promote, enhance, represent and protect our historical neighborhood and have a well-maintained park, streets, and sidewalks. Some of the things we would like to do include installing historical signage for our neighborhood, burying overhead power lines in public areas, and

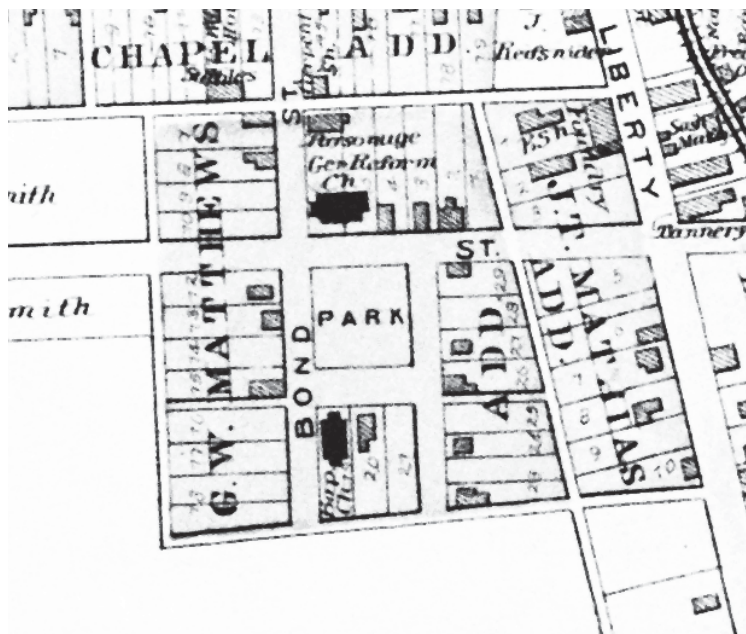
installing historical lighting in our neighborhood.

Neighborhood Boundaries

Just where is the proposed Belle Grove Historic Neighborhood? That is a great question. From our visits with neighbors around the park, it's been proposed that our neighborhood consist of the G. W. Matthews addition that is shown to the right - the original city development including Belle Grove Square. The only addition to this would be the properties that are shown on Chase Street - a number of people have suggested that these houses should be included as a part of the proposed neighborhood because of their proximity to the park and very similar character.

Our Mission Statement

The Belle Grove Square Historic Neighborhood Association is a member-driven organization dedicated to actively promoting a neighborhood with a heightened sense of community within a historic neighborhood where



The boundaries of the original G.W. Matthews addition and surrounding area.

residents can enjoy beauty, security, and safety.

Vision Statement

Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Association is dedicated to the promotion and implementation of programs and events that will promote:

- a beautiful, secure and safe environment to live and play;
- a friendly and inclusive neighborhood that looks to the

welfare of all of its residents;

- a neighborhood with a strong and vibrant sense of community;
- a historic neighborhood that strives to preserve the past with an eye to the future;
- a strong, active and involved membership that takes pride in the community and works for the interests of its residents.

Mitchell Edmondson lives at 1 Park Avenue on Belle Grove Square.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

by *Bruce DeVault*

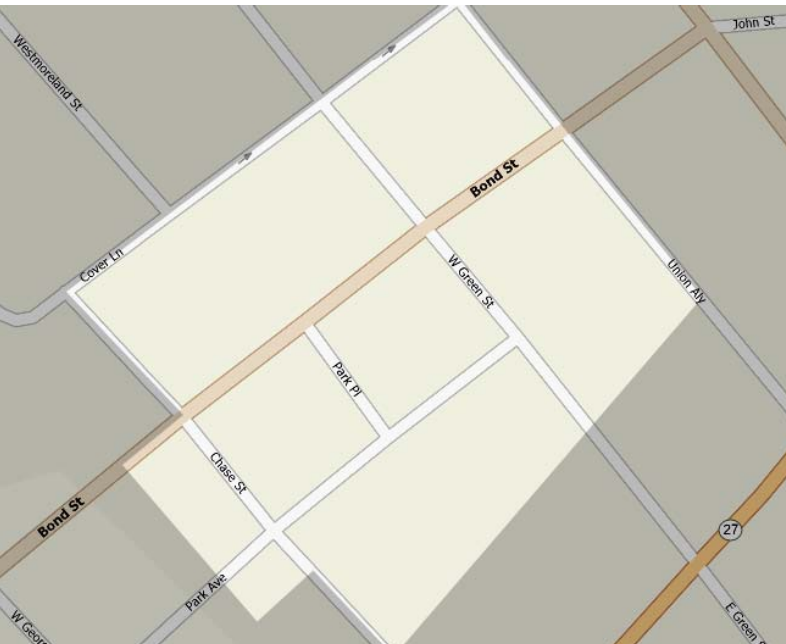
We've put this newsletter together as a way to hopefully help with organizing the effort to speak out on behalf of everyone in the neighborhood - to keep Belle Grove Square a great place to live and help make things even better in the days and years to come.

Mitchell and I have both lived in well organized, historic neighborhoods in the past, and know what great things can be

done when a neighborhood works together as one to get things done.

In the future, be sure to check out the Belle Grove Square website - www.bellegrovesquare.org is now being set up, but we hope to have plenty online soon, including additional stories and pictures. Please let us know how we can best help make and keep this a great place to call home!

Bruce DeVault lives at 1 Park Avenue on Belle Grove Square.



Proposed boundary of Belle Grove Square neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD CALENDAR

Every Saturday

Downtown Westminster Farmers Market (Every Saturday)

Conaway Parking Lot, Railroad Ave. (Rt. 27) & Emerald Hill Lane, 8:00 AM - 12:00 PM

A "Producers Only" market of farm fresh fruits and vegetables, baked goods, plants and honey. Organic products also available.

Wednesday, August 6, 2008

Carroll County Arts Council 2008 Summer Kids Series: The Elephant's Child

Carroll Arts Center, 96 W. Main St., 10:30 AM & 1:30 PM

This setting of Rudyard Kipling's classic story is a superbly rendered and wonderously imaginative interpretation of the Elephant Child's quest for knowledge and truth. At the heart of the performance are award winning singers/musicians David and Monique Griffiths. This husband-wife team has performed throughout North America and recently returned from an African tour.

Saturday, August 9, 2008

Carroll County Summer Farmers Market "Peach Festival"

Agriculture Center, 700 Agriculture Center Dr., 8:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Free peach treats, entertainment, produce, crafts, baked goods and Bike Run.

Saturday, August 9, 2008

Child Survival Project '08 - A Concert Event

Agriculture Center, 700 Agriculture Center Dr., 12:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Several bands, silent auction, moonbounce and face painting.

Saturday, August 9, 2008

Peach Festival

Bixlers Methodist Church, 3372 Bixler Church Rd., 12:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Bluegrass band, locally-grown produce, children's activities, baked goods and food.

Tuesday, August 12, 2008

Ariel Wickham and The Wolfe Quartet present: Help Us Get to Siberia: A Jazz Review

Carroll Arts Center, 96 W. Main St., 7:00 PM

This local group of talented jazz young musicians has been invited to perform at a jazz festival in Novosibirsk, Russia. This local performance will help to raise funds for this journey.

Thursday, August 14, 2008

Carroll County Arts Council 2008 Summer Kids Series: Flipper

Carroll Arts Center, 96 W. Main St., 10:30 AM & 1:30 PM

Based on the extremely popular TV series, "Flipper" tells the compelling story of an eccentric fisherman, his nephew and a brilliant dolphin. Elijah Wood stars in the masterfully filmed, feel-good family movie.

Saturday, August 16, 2008

FLICC presents: "Calendar Girls"

Carroll Arts Center, 96 W. Main St., 8:00 PM

Twelve stuffy British matrons "take it all off" to help a friend who loses her husband to cancer. Their nude calendar becomes a fundraising hit and helps these women learn a lot about themselves and the powerful bonds of friendship.

Saturday, August 16, 2008

Carroll County Summer Farmers Market "Best of Summer"

Agriculture Center, 700 Agriculture Center Dr., 8:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Local produce, eggs, plants, fresh flowers and baked goods.

Saturday, August 16, 2008

Peach Festival

Benjamin's-Krider's United Church of Christ, 208 Krider's Church Rd., 3:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Bluegrass band, cake walks and food.

Saturday, August 16, 2008 - Sunday, August 17, 2008

MD Four Seasons Fine Art and Craft Summer Market

Agriculture Center, 700 Agriculture Center Dr., 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Handcrafted art/crafts from traditional to contemporary art.

Saturday, August 23, 2008

Peach Festival

St. John's Lutheran Church, 827 Leister's Church Rd., 4 PM - ?

Saturday, August 23, 2008

Carroll County Summer Farmers Market "Health Fair"

Agriculture Center, 700 Agriculture Center Dr., 8:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Blood pressure and cholesterol screening. Local produce, plants, fresh flowers, baked goods and jams & jellies.

Sunday, August 24, 2008

Westminster Municipal Band's Old-Fashioned Concert

Belle Grove Square, corner of Green St. and Bond St., 6:00 PM - 7:15 PM

Bring chairs and blankets for seating.

Saturday, August 30, 2008

Carroll County Summer Farmers Market "Back to School"

Agriculture Center, 700 Agriculture Center Dr., 8:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Local produce, crafts, plants, fresh flowers, baked goods and jams & jellies. Door prizes.

Sunday, August 31, 2008

Worship in the Park

Belle Grove Square, corner of Green St. and Bond St., 8:30 AM - 10:30 AM

Annual worship service in Belle Grove Square with both St. Paul's UCC and Church of the Brethren - bring a chair and enjoy the service!

Saturday, September 6, 2008

St. Paul's UCC Family Fair & Picnic

St. Paul's UCC / Belle Grove Square, 3:00 PM - 8:00 PM

There will be a potluck picnic dinner, moon bounce, kids' games, bingo, silent auction, dunking booth, face painting, magic show, musical entertainment, and crafts.

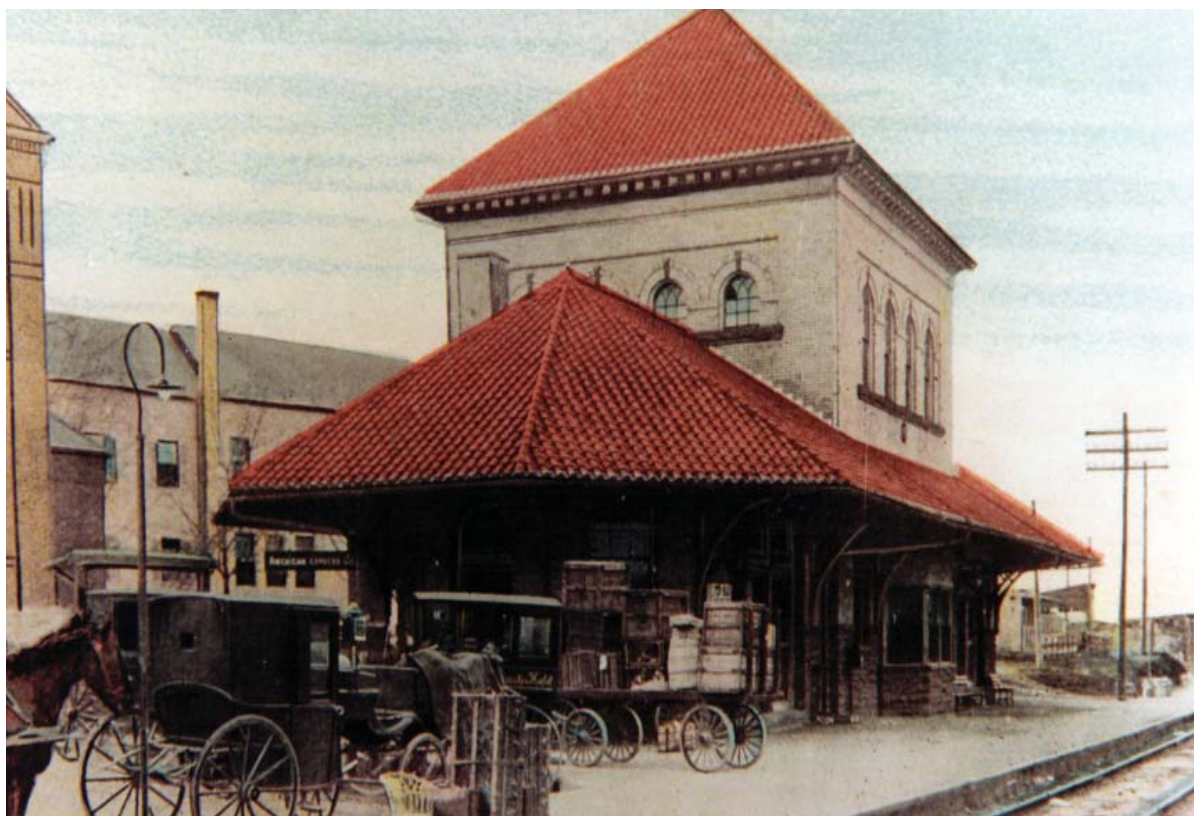
Do you know of neighborhood events coming up? Please let us know so we can include them!

REMEMBERING THE RAILROAD STATION

by Eileen Fisher Churchill

These photographs were taken of the south side of East Main Street at the railroad tracks. The Western Maryland Railroad built the station, St. John School is the building in the background with the smoke stack, and the original Westminster Trust Bank is on the left. This large area is now the site of the Library, a law office, and a parking lot. All of these buildings, along with the St. John Catholic Church were built in the second half of the 19th century, and they anchored the lovely downtown.

My grandfather settled in Westminster in 1921, as the Ford Motor Company dealer, selling Model-Ts and tractors. The vehicles would arrive by train, and granddad and my dad, along with the Ford mechanics, would lift them from the flat-bed train cars in pieces. Then, using only a screwdriver and a wrench, they



Western Maryland Railroad Station, Westminster, MD

would assemble the cars and tractors right in the station. The completed cars and tractors would then be pushed to the showroom, a large 19th brick building on the corner of West Main and Bond Streets. That showroom was demolished by the predecessor of the BBT Bank, along with my parent's first home next door.

All of these architectural gems vanished, torn down in the "urban renewal" craze on the 1970's, after standing more than a hundred years. Their loss changed the profile of our downtown forever. In that same decade, the County demolished the wonderful seminary at Willis Street and

Do you have pictures or stories about the history of the area? We would like to hear from you!



Court Place to create a handful of parking spaces.

As a third generation Westminsterite, I feel a strong commitment to preserving Belle Grove Square as an historic neighborhood, maintaining its charm. So I am delighted to be part of the initial newsletter to the neighborhood.

Eileen Fisher Churchill lives on Belle Grove Square.

DID YOU KNOW?

Volunteers from Woman's Club of Westminster meet most Thursday mornings to work on the flowers in Belle Grove Square.

Several local Belle Grove Square residents have also volunteered to plant and keep up the flower beds by Park Place.



Volunteers from Woman's Club of Westminster gather together to work on their great flower bed by Green Street in Belle Grove Square.

Woman's Club of Westminster

We caught up with Sharon Quinter and her committee co-chair Trinkia Cuman on a Thursday morning as they and their group of Woman's Club of Westminster volunteers were working on the group's plantings at Belle Grove Square.

The Woman's Club does a variety of good works throughout town, and the Belle Grove Square flowers are only the start. With about a hundred members from all walks of life, the group is always looking for new members to share the good times to be had. The club holds regular meetings in the new Carroll Community non-profit building, 255 Clifton Blvd.

For more information on the club, visit them on the web at <http://www.gfwcmd.org/clubs/westminster/> or email njswam22@aol.com.



THE HISTORY OF BELLE GROVE SQUARE

by Jay A. Graybeal

William Winchester's 1764 town plan of Westminster was linear in form and did not include a central town square. For this reason, public spaces evolved around the hills at each end of town. Later additions to the city followed and expanded on the original street plans and none included a public square. The creation of Belle Grove Park in 1877 came about purely through the generosity of Westminster residents Mr. and Mrs. George W. Matthews. Matthews had recently developed a parcel of land, known as Matthews' Addition, containing thirty lots bounded by West Green, Bond, Matthews (now Park Place) and Park Streets. He reserved the center for a park primarily for the use of the residents of his addition. As early as June 1875 the city had approached Matthews to discuss the transference of the park, initially mentioned in the city council minutes as "LaFayette Square". Matthews agreed to consider the request but wanted to discuss the matter with the adjacent property owners. In the meantime the park was already being used for public purposes. On July 4, 1876, the City dedicated a monument commemorating the Centennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The brownstone marker still stands in the park.

George and Maria Matthews offered the one-acre park to the city in March 1877 and a deed was recorded on May 21st. The presentation of the deed to the city was reported in the May 12, 1877 issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper:

Gift to the City

On last Monday evening our very estimable Citizen Geo. W. Matthews, Esq., appeared before the City Council and presented them with a deed for what is known as the public square, near the Reformed Church, free of all charges. The gift was accepted in a neat speech by a member of the board, and a vote of thanks on behalf of the people unanimously tendered the liberal doner [sic]. The title to the valuable and beautifully situated public square is now absolutely invested in the city of Westminster, and by the terms of the deed is to [be] used for pleasure, recreation and peaceable gatherings, free for all citizens.

It now remains for the city to protect, decorate or otherwise embellish this public square, and to make it appropriately

attractive. At the same time it is the duty of every person to protect it as he would his own property. Doubtless the time will come, when by the wisdom of the people this square will be like McBeth's [sic] castle, "which had a pleasant seat, where the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses."

The deed to the city stated that the city was responsible for maintaining the park and there was to be free access to those residing in Matthews' Addition. The park was also intended for "all citizens or inhabitants said City of Westminster, and to all well behaved persons whatever, to use only as a pleasure ground, and place of resort, temporarily, for innocent amusement or recreation." The City installed curbing, planted shade trees and provided public seating.

Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Belle Grove Square was the site of many public events of the type envisioned by Matthews. When he died in 1903 he was fondly remembered by the citizens of Westminster in an obituary published in the August 28th issue of the Westminster American Sentinel newspaper:

George W. Matthews

The venerable George W. Matthews, one of the most prominent and public-spirited citizens of Westminster, died at his home at 8 o'clock, last Sunday morning, at the advanced age of nearly 90 years. Mr. Matthews was born on the farm of his father, the late William Matthews, in Baltimore county, February 7, 1814. He was of English descent, though his ancestry in this country antedated the Revolutionary War,



Mail carriers line up their vehicles at Belle Grove Square, Westminster, in 1926. Harry Kimmey, the postmaster, stands in the foreground.

in which his grandfather served as a soldier of the Continental Army. His father was also an American soldier, and, as a light horseman, participated in the battle of North Point, and the defense of Baltimore, September 12, 1814. Mr. Matthews came to this county about 50 years ago and first engaged in farming as the owner of an estate on the Patapsco. This he subsequently sold, and, in 1864, removed to this city and became a member of the firm of Wagoner & Matthews, which conducted an extensive foundry and agricultural implement manufactory for a number of years. Later he engaged in other business enterprises, but 15 or 20 years ago retired from active participation in private pursuits and became a justice of the peace, an office which he filled with ability and intelligence until about seven years ago.

The city is indebted to his generosity for the possession of its only public square, a beautiful parcel of ground containing about an acre, located in the heart of the town and known as Belle Grove Park, a name given it in honor of one of his daughters, then Miss Belle Matthews, of this city. He also donated to the Baptist church, of which he was an ardent member, a large lot fronting on the park, upon which a church of that denomination was erected, but has since passed into the hands of the German Baptist Brethren.

Mr. Matthews leaves a widow and two daughters (Mrs. Belle M. Garrettson, of Kenton, O., and Miss Laura Matthews, of Bowie, Md.) His only son,



Belle Grove square in full bloom in spring 2008 - trees planted many years ago and maintained by the city of Westminister and many volunteers for the benefit of all.

R. Charles Matthews, died about two years ago. He also leaves three grandsons, one granddaughter, two great-grandsons and five great-granddaughters. One of his grandsons is Mr. George E. Matthews, a well known business man of this city. The late Capt. B. F. Matthews, of Baltimore, a veteran of the Civil War was his half-brother. Messrs. Winfield Matthews, residing in the West, and Mr. Thomas Matthews, another Civil War, veteran, of Baltimore, are also his half brothers. Funeral

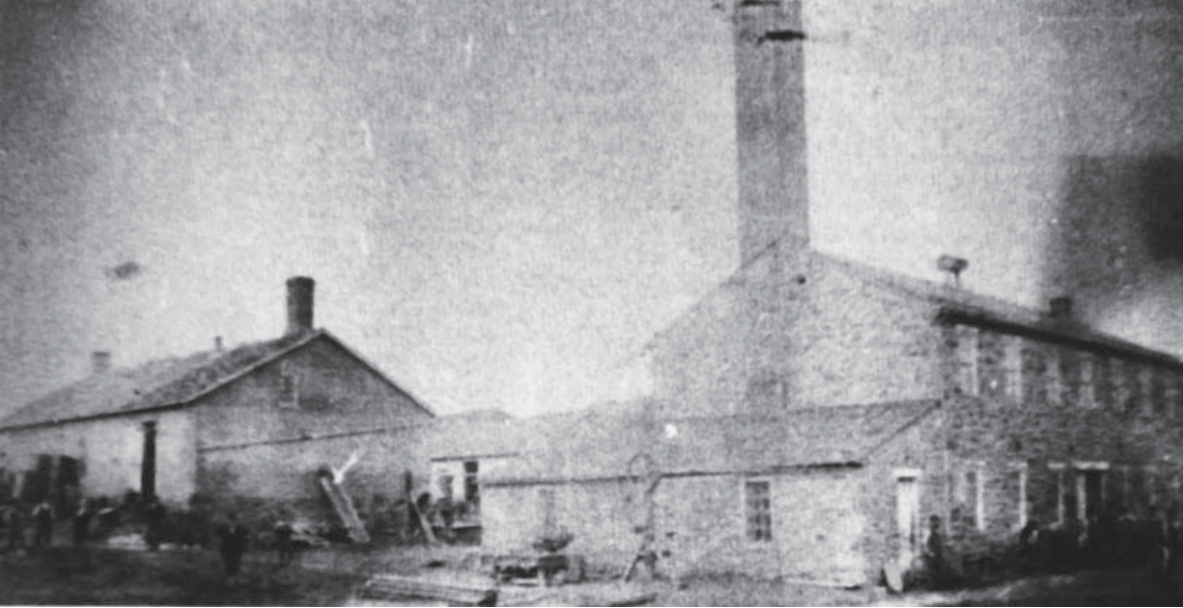
services were held at the residence of the deceased on Monday afternoon, Elder Chas. D. Bonsack, of the German Baptist Church, and Rev. D. G. Miller, of Centenary M. E. Church, officiating. The pallbearers were: Messrs. Samuel Erb, Wm. H. McCollum, Nelson Gilbert, E. D. Bowersox, George Erb, and Louis P. Manning, of Salem Lodge, I. O. O. F., of which deceased was a member. The remains were interred in Westminister Cemetery.

Belle Grove Square was restored by the Woman's Club of Westminister, with help from other local organizations, as a

Bicentennial project. The work included the restoration of the fountain, installation of flagpoles and landscaping. These recent efforts were in keeping with the 1877 City Council resolution acknowledging the gift and pledging to "endeavor to show our appreciation of the value of the gift by so improving and adorning the grounds thus conveyed that they shall serve as a beautiful memorial of the donors and remain a perpetual testimonial of our gratitude to the same."

Editor's note: this article was originally published in Carroll County Times on 24 November 1996. Reprinted by permission.

Do you have pictures or stories about the history of the Belle Grove Square neighborhood? We would like to hear from you!



Pictured above is the B. F. Shriver Company canning plant on Liberty Street, Westminster, Maryland, at what was then known as the “Stone Building” around 1885. The Stone Building is now the home of O’Lordans Irish Pub & Restaurant.

Next Issue:

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS

FIRST NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

HISTORIC PRESERVATION TAX CREDITS

HISTORY OF BELLE GROVE SQUARE HOUSES

MORE NEIGHBORHOOD PHOTOS & STORIES!

A Former Mayor’s Perspective on the Square

The tradition of public gatherings in Belle Grove Square began during the years following the Civil War when civic-minded public improvements and amenities, such as gas lights, water systems, paved roads and concrete sidewalks were important public issues discussed in Westminster.

The coming of the railroad to Westminster in 1861 - and the National Banking Act of 1864 - accelerated Westminster’s process of residential and commercial annexation and mercantile expansion, a process as old as the city itself. Westminster’s first annexation occurred in 1788, just 24 years after the City’s founding in 1764.

In the 1870s, Westminster annexed a residential development by George W. Matthews, which

included the area around what was to later become Belle Grove Square. (Mr. Matthews was part owner of the Wagner and Matthew’s Foundry and Machine Shops, where “The Stone Building” is on Liberty Street, before it became a cannery as photographed above in about 1885.) In a tradition and practice carried on to this day; as part of the residential development, Mr. Matthews donated Belle Grove Square (named after his daughter - Carrie Belle) to be a community green space on May 8th, 1877.

Belle Grove Square was one of the first known deeded green spaces in the City. Belle Grove Square was restored by the GFWC Woman’s Club of Westminster in 1976. The Club’s demonstrated civic-minded generosity continues as it tends to the gardens to this day. In an

interesting twist of historic fate, George W. Matthews’ son, George E. Matthews was the Mayor 60 years later in 1937, when the Westminster Playground was dedicated – the same year Carrie Belle died. (Mayor Matthews was elected in 1926 and died in office in 1938. He was also concurrently the Chief of Police.)

One such civic-minded project, in 1893, was the fountain for Belle Grove Square. The cost of the fountain was \$398.37. Just as with many other successful community improvements in Westminster, it was entirely paid for with contributions from the private sector, much of which was raised by having a festival. The festival raised \$252.64 for the Belle Grove Square Fountain. Compare that to Westminster’s present day Fallfest, which began in 1978, and each year attracts over 40,000 visitors to raise money for local charities. Fallfest will be held this year on September 25th through the 28th,

2008. Civic-minded generosity and public demonstrations of coming together as a community have long been a part of Westminster.

The festival that raised money for the fountain in Belle Grove Square was held in 1893, which is also the year to which the Westminster Municipal Band traces its origins. That tradition of coming together in a public demonstration of celebrating community at Belle Grove Square has continued every year for 111 years. Other examples of local celebrations are the Flower and Jazz Festival in May; Celebrate Local Heroes in August, organized by Lori Graham in Dutterer Park (another example of civic minded generosity by another venerable family in Westminster – the Dutterer family) and Fallfest. Won’t you come out and join us for a great demonstration of community on Sunday evening, August 24th, 2008 and enjoy the annual Westminster Municipal Band concert in Belle Grove Square.

Editor’s note: adapted with respect from an article on a public address by former City of Westminster mayor Kevin Dayhoff which appeared in Westminster Advocate on 25 August 2004. Edited for current 2008 annual event information.

WE NEED YOUR HELP.

Do you have pictures, stories or other history of the Belle Grove Square neighborhood?

PLEASE CONTACT US AT 443.293.7203, EMAIL NEWSLETTER@BELLEGROVESQUARE.ORG OR VISIT US ON THE WEB AT WWW.BELLEGROVESQUARE.ORG... WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!