



HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD

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Happy Halloween!



by Mitchell Edmondson

Fall is that time of year when there is a hint of coolness to the air and the evening shadows quickly make their appearance known as the sun slips beneath the horizon. Very soon lighted Jack o' lanterns will make their appearance as kids dressed in scary costumes trick or treat in Belle Grove Square. As you look out across our beloved Belle Grove Square, you can imagine all the many others who have walked along paths covered with swirling autumn leaves. Through the years, our park and the fountain at its center has not always looked the way it does on a cool October night in 2008. The American Sentinel reported that on Saturday, June 11, 1892, a meeting of local citizens was held at the store of Mr. Fred Miller to make arrangements for a festival to be held to help raise money to improve Belle Grove Park. The proceeds of the festival helped raise most of the money needed to construct the fountain in the park. According to an article in the July 8, 1983 edition of the American Sentinel, the first fountain made its appearance in 1893. The cost of the first fountain and its erection was \$398.37. The citizens of Baltimore donated an additional \$46.25 to help build the fountain.

Eventually through time, that fountain was lost and replaced with a flowerbed.

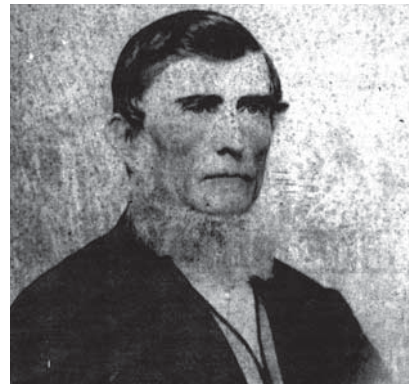
In fact, our fountain was a flowerbed until 1976 when the City of Westminster and the Woman's league reinstalled the fountain in honor of the bicentennial.

The destruction and removal of the original tiered fountain is shrouded in mystery. According to some accounts, the fountain was dismantled and thrown away on a pile of other rock and debris. Another tale has the fountain rescued by a member of the Matthews family and can still be seen today on the road to Taneytown. Perhaps someone in Belle Grove Square knows the true details of the fate of the original tiered fountain. If so, please contact us so we can sort this mystery out.

Histories of Belle Grove Square Area Houses

In future editions of the newsletter, we hope to discuss the history of houses in our neighborhood. This month we will start with the George W. Matthew house located at 1 Park Avenue. The house is featured in the Christopher Weeks' *The Building of Westminster in Maryland*.

As most of you probably know by reading the granite plaque in the park, Mr. George W. Matthews and his wife officially deeded Belle Grove Square to the citizens of Westminster on



George W. Matthews donated the land that is now Belle Grove Square to the City of Westminster.

May 2, 1877. However, our park and neighborhood can trace its development back to 1866 when George Matthews (a Carroll County Grosvenor) bought the land from John B. Boyle for \$3000.00. He laid out 30 lots, with most of them fronting the square. Our neighborhood is platted on the 1876 city map as the G. W. Matthews edition.

According to the research done by the Maryland Historical Trust, Mr. George W. Matthews built the house that Bruce and I bought at 1 Park Avenue. It is hard to pin down the exact date it was built, but sometime between 1866 and 1870 the portion that faces Green Street was built. The latest edition that faces the park was built in 1906. We can verify this fact by evidence left in the basement. Luckily, our house hasn't had too many

renovations or modifications through the years. After being built by George Matthews, the house was sold to Samuel Shunk for \$2550.00 on September 30, 1885 and then sold to William Thomas for \$1800.00 on May 8, 1901. In 1905 the house was sold again to Ezra C. Brown who owned it for 14 years before selling it to Theodore F. Englar who sold part of the lot to Louis K. Woodward on February 6, 1929. The house remained in the Woodward family until recently. When we cleaned out the attic a few weeks ago, we came across many things that were once owned by the Woodward family. One old trunk even contained the sheets used for the examining table used by patients. As I sifted through more than 100 years of history, I was amazed by some of the things I found. There were many old newspapers, magazines, and other clippings from the local papers. There were boxes of old clothes and hats that appeared to be from the 1920's. I saved a few boxes of history and will leave them in the house for the next owners.

On the first day as we were moving into the house, a neighbor stopped by and sat down on our front porch as we were unloading the moving van. He asked us if we knew the history of the house and the neighborhood. We told him that we knew that it once belonged to a prominent local doctor named Woodward and that the Woodward family had owned the house for many

years. Our visitor confirmed what we had heard about the doctor, however, our moving in day visitor also told us of another possible habitant of 1 Park Avenue. It seems that our house was used by the doctor to treat his patients. Folks visiting Dr. Woodward would use the Green Street entrance to receive medical care. This part of the story has been verified by the many folks who have told us that they once received treatment in the house for broken bones, colds, and other ailments.

Our moving day visitor also told us of a spooky tale he heard from the last folks to rent the house. According to our visitor, a couple with children lived in the house for a short while. They quickly moved out because their six-year-old daughter had started talking to the others who lived in the house. No one else could see these other occupants of the house. It seems that perhaps some of Dr. Woodward's patients had died in the house and their spirits still linger in the house. The parents were very worried about the "ghosts" that live in 1 Park Avenue and they quickly moved out. Needless to say, after hearing this story, we were reluctant to see what awaited us as we spent our first night in the old house. That first night I kept expecting to hear or see something that would make the hairs stand up on my arms. Much to my relief, nothing unusual happened since we have moved into the old house.

Updates on the Belle Grove Square Group and Newsletter

by Bruce DeVault

This month's newsletter is in a simpler format and shorter than the previous two, due to limited time this month after volunteering at Fall Fest and the neighborhood meeting. We'll continue to make changes as we go along to keep the newsletter going steady and in a sustainable format.

The Belle Grove Square neighborhood group held its first meeting Sept. 25 and had set a next meeting for Thursday, Oct. 16 but it turned out afterwards a good number of neighbors who wanted to attend expressed that they had scheduling conflicts for that date, so in consideration of this it made sense to cancel the October meeting and meet next instead in November when hopefully more neighbors can make it. This will also give more time for review and improvement of the bylaws to be considered at the next meeting. We'll announce the next meeting date in the November newsletter.

Note: If there were such a thing, and our house were authentically haunted, I suppose I would be the fellow in front selling tickets and "Ghost Tour" T-shirts. -Bruce DeVault.



This photograph, from the Historical Society of Carroll County, is one of the earliest known views of Westminister, taken in the late 1860s. St. Paul's United Church of Christ, still under construction, its roof covered with boards and its steeple not yet completed, can be seen in the center, near a large as yet undeveloped area that became Belle Grove Square.

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Letters to the editor are welcomed. Letters submitted may be edited for space or clarity.

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West George Street Neighborhood Organizes

The residents of West George Street have banded together to form the West George Street Volunteer Neighborhood Association. West George Street residents have rebuilt sidewalks at their own expense. Residents have started working on a project that will involve planting new trees in their neighborhood. The Westminster Tree Commission donated the trees, which will be planted in the fall. The Westminster Tree Commission is dedicated to protecting old growth trees and planting new trees in the city. The commission was formed in the 1980's with the mission to beautify the city and make it a better place for its residents.

Belle Grove Neighbors Hold First Meeting

The Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Association held its first meeting Thursday, September 25th at St. Paul's. Neighbors got to know each other and a committee was formed to work on bylaws.

Neighbors Participate in Westminster Fall Fest

Many local residents enjoyed Westminster's annual Fall Fest which started with the parade on Wednesday, September 24th. Richard and Darthean Fox proudly drove an antique fire truck in the parade.



Neighbors Richard and Darthean Fox drove an antique fire truck in the Westminster Fall Fest parade Wednesday, September 24, 2008.

Matthews Addition Success Linked to the W. Maryland Railroad

The railroad came to Westminster with the arrival of the Western Maryland Railroad in 1861. This photo shows the train depot and Main Street. The train tracks crossed Main Street at an angle near Liberty Street. Factories grew up along the tracks and hotels sprang up around town to accommodate the travelers arriving by rail. The G. W. Matthews addition was developed shortly thereafter. According to Christopher Weeks in *The Building of Westminster in Maryland*, one reason the houses on Belle Grove Square were such a success was their closeness to the railroad: Not one of the lots was further than 300 yards from the depot. When the land

was donated for the park in Belle Grove Square, city officials were so worried that hobos who rode the rails would make themselves at home in the park that they insisted on a fence being built around the park to keep the hobos out.

City Holds King Street Park Planning Meeting

Area residents gathered at St. Paul's September 29th to discuss future enhancements to King Street Park. Plans were presented for playground equipment, landscaping, and a volleyball court. Mayor Tom Ferguson said that they hoped to be able to soon begin work on the project. Some of the funds for the enhancements are being donated by the property developer building houses north of the park.



The railroad came to Westminster with the arrival of the Western Maryland Railroad in 1861. The tracks crossed Main Street near Liberty Street. This panoramic view looking east on Main Street was taken c. 1900. (HSCC)



Belle Grove Park and St. Paul's German Reformed Church are shown in this postcard from the 1920s. The fountain is shown in the middle of the square.

St. Paul's Family Fair a Big Success Despite Rain

Despite tropical storm Hanna, St. Paul had its annual Old Fashioned Family Fair and Picnic on September 6th. According to Reverend Marty Kuchma, all activities were moved into the church and great fun was had all those who braved the elements.

Speaking of Reverend Marty Kuchma, the Carroll County Times recently carried a front page story concerning Marty and his work with the Westminster Ministerium which held its first September Summit on September 23rd. The Westminster Ministerium is a group of local pastors who join together in prayer, fellowship and work on community projects.

Historic Property Rehabilitation Tax Credit

One of the benefits to living within the bounds of the city's National Register district is that there are incentives for property owner's to undertake rehabilitation of maintenance of their homes. You can receive a ten percent tax credit for repairs that are approved by the city's Historic District Commission. In order to receive the credit, you must first have your application approved by the commission before beginning the work. There is also the possibility of a 20% state tax credit as well. According to the basic guidelines for Westminster's historic property rehabilitation tax credit, many projects that are necessary maintenance to the exterior of a historic structure, or are necessary to rehabilitate a structure may be eligible for the tax

credit. Generally eligible repairs include exterior painting, repointing of exterior brick, repair of a building's exterior with materials that are similar to the materials used originally, and replacement of a deteriorated building roof with in kind materials. Other items such as replacement of a furnace, heat pump, or hot water heater may also be eligible for the tax credit. Plumbing and electrical repairs, adding central air conditioning, repair of windows, painting or repair of interior surfaces, rehabilitation of a kitchen or bathroom with in kind materials may also be eligible for the tax credit. All work must be performed with the least possible impact on historic features and materials in order to be eligible. The project must also cost at least \$5000.00 and be completed within 2 years. As you can see, it may be possible to repair and maintain your historic home and get a tax credit in the process. Please contact the City of Westminster at (410) 848-4628 for more information.

Do you have pictures or history of Belle Grove Square? We would love to hear from you!



Local kids seemed to want to help wash the fountain after a summer season of enjoyment, and donated three bottles of Mr. Bubbles. Surely not as entertaining for the Public Works Department, which had to clean up the prank.