



HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD

VOLUME 1 ~ ISSUE 5 ~ 2008 DECEMBER

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Happy Holidays!



by Mitchell Edmondson

Our neighborhood of Historic Belle Grove Square was established during the Victorian Era. The Victorian era corresponds with the reign of Queen Victoria in England from 1839 to 1901. When we celebrate the holidays with family and friends, we have the Victorians to thank for many of its joyful festivities and delightful customs. They revived old traditions, such as caroling, and invented new ones

such as sending holiday greeting cards.

When she was Queen, Victoria had a tree at Windsor Castle. In 1848, an etching of Victoria, Albert, and their children gathered around their decorated tree was published in *The Illustrated London News*. At about the same time, Charles Minnegerode, a German professor at the College of William and Mary, trimmed a small evergreen to delight the children at the St.

George Tucker House.

As a result, trees became the popular fashion in England and the central feature of the Victorian family Christmas. German settlers had brought the custom to America, but when the same illustration of Victoria and her family appeared in *Goody's Lady's Book* in 1850, Christmas trees became even more popular in America than in England.

What made the Victorian Christmas tree so special was its elaborate decoration. Decorations included gingerbread men, marzipan candies, hard candies, cookies, fruit, cotton-batting Santas, paper fans, tin soldiers, whistles, wind-up toys, pinecones, dried fruits, nuts, berries, and trinkets of all kinds. Paper cornucopias filled with nuts, candies, and other treats were the Victorian favorite. It was not uncommon to find some small homemade gifts, such as tiny hand-stitched dolls or children's mittens, and freshly baked treats



Both of these holiday cards were printed by L. Prang & Co. in 1878.

like sugar cookies. Hand-dipped candles were placed carefully on each of the branches. A Christmas doll or angel could usually be found adorning the top of the tree.

Children often helped to make the tree decorations. They would string garlands of popcorn or cranberries, or make chains of paper flowers. Some families set up a Nativity or outdoor scene under the tree, using moss for grass and mirrors for ponds.

Later in the century imported ornaments from Germany began to replace the homemade ones. First came glass icicles and hand-blown glass globes called kugels. Dresdens, which were embossed silver and gold cardboard ornaments, took exotic shapes—moons, butterflies, fish, birds, ships, animals, flowers, trolley cars, and even automobiles.

The Victorians decorated their homes in bold wallpaper, ornate furnishings, lace, and richly colored draperies, and this love for decorating carried right over into the way they decorated for the holidays, as well. Although many of the Victorians had very little money to spend on extravagant decorations, they were enthusiastic in their celebration of the Christmas season. They turned to nature for inspiration and found fresh, rich greenery, flowers, pinecones, berries, and fruit, which were all used to create colorful displays. Early in December the Victorian household began to decorate, covering every available inch of the house with greenery. Spruce, balsam, laurel, cedar, ivy, mistletoe, and holly graced tables, banisters, chandeliers, archways, columns, and woodwork. Mistletoe dangled from the ceiling of the entry hall. Even picture frames and mirrors were wrapped with evergreen rope. Wreaths could be found hung on doors or behind windowpanes.

The Victorian parlor played an important role for the

holiday season. The parlor was transformed into an enchanted winter wonderland filled with decorations such as garlands of cranberries and popcorn, tinsel and paper chains, paper and lace ornaments, tissue-paper snowflakes, glittering glass balls, angels, fairies and Santas. The candles on a glittering tree adorned with an angel or star on the treetop became the centerpiece of the room. Under the Christmas tree sat the tempting gifts, wrapped in colorful paper and tied with taffeta ribbons. Some were lavishly garnished with the addition of fine flowers and greenery. Colored glass lamps and candles throughout the room cast a festive glow. The fire blazed merrily, and stockings dangled from the fireplace filled with bulging with gifts and treats. An army of toy soldiers marched on the mantel above. The fragrance of cedar boughs drifted throughout the house, and arrangements of holly and ivy brought the peace of the winter woods indoors.

The very first Christmas card was printed in December 1843, at the request of Sir Henry Cole, who was also the instigator of the Great Exhibition of 1851 and founder and first director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Indeed, he was responsible for the whole idea of sending Christmas cards through the post when he decided to surprise his friends with a novel and colorful card at Christmas time instead of the usual Christmas letter. It was designed as a way to offer seasonal greetings without having to write out hundreds of personal messages.

The artist J.C. Horsley was commissioned to produce the card that is now among the most sought after by collectors. The card illustrated a wealthy family enjoying a Christmas feast as they all toast the festive season by sipping wine and it was all set within a woody, rustic border hung with ivy, grapes and vine leaves (holly did not appear on Christmas cards until 1848).

PRANG'S ILLUMINATED Christmas & New Year Cards.

These beautiful cards, which are issued in a great variety of styles and designs, are growing in public favor from year to year, in Europe as well as in America. For sale by all Stationers and Book-dealers.

N.B.—These cards are copyrighted, and all infringements will be prosecuted.

Illustrated Catalogues of our other publications, all of which are admirably well suited for

HOLIDAY PRESENTS,

Will be mailed gratis to any address on application.

L. PRANG & CO., Boston.

This advertisement for holiday greeting cards and others like it appeared in Victorian era newspapers throughout the northeast.

The custom of sending holiday greetings soon caught on tremendously in the nineteenth century since people had become more mobile. Victoria herself sent thousands of cards at Christmas.

By the middle years of the Victorian Era, cards were varied in size, shape and material. Many cards were extremely elaborate with gilded, embossed, shaped, pop-up and pierced forms. Victorian cards sported fancy silk fringe, lace, satin, sachets, tinsel, feathers, fold outs, pop-outs, and pull tabs for animation. Like Victorian valentines, Christmas cards featured cherubs, flowers, animals, and images of spring. Biblical figures were also common images on holiday cards. Small children were sentimentalized on Victorian Christmas cards, with children of the poor and orphans as well, being extensively portrayed. Indeed, a large number of such cards were published at the time; it was the era of sailor suits and pretty bonnets in particular. Children were always portrayed as pretty, with round faces, wide eyes, and red Cupid's-bow lips. Novelty cards were a big hit in Victorian times, especially those that played a trick or worked mechanically. Very few of these early Victorian Christmas cards illustrate the

religious meaning of the festival, and they rarely show landscapes blanketed in snow or warmly clad skaters on ponds or even reindeers pulling Father Christmas's sleigh over the countryside which are all so common today on our cards.

Louis Prang, who came to the United States from Germany in 1850, was the man who brought the American Christmas card into

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Letters to the editor
are welcomed.

Letters submitted may be
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its own. In 1874, Prang decided to print a selection of Christmas cards for export to England. The response was so positive that the following year he printed enough to sell in the home market as well.

In 1880, Louis Prang began a yearly design competition that offered a \$1,000 first prize. His competition attracted some of the most talented artists. As the artists began to offer striking original designs, Prang enlarged his cards, often to seven by ten inches. One

side was devoted to the design itself, and the other side carried the sentiment and a short biography of the artist. Always excellent in color quality and finish, Prang's cards cost up to a dollar each. There are several examples of L. Prang & Co. Cards featured on the cover of this newsletter.

Although the commercial aspects of Christmas were greatly looked down upon from many of the church pulpits, merchants continued to promote Christmas.

Toy stores, confectioners' shops and German bakeries began to stay open late and to festoon their windows with red silk bunting and holly. Holiday shoppers could not resist the cakes, the smells of cinnamon kitchens and sweet almond paste. In 1867, one year after G.W. Matthews bought the land that became Belle Grove Square, Macy's department store in New York City remained open until midnight on Christmas Eve. 1874 was the year of the first window displays with a Christmas theme at Macy's. One window displayed an amphitheater of wax, rag, bisque, and hand-painted porcelain dolls imported from Germany France,

Austria, Switzerland and Bohemia. In another window, scenes from Uncle Tom's Cabin were composed in a panorama with steam-driven movable parts. In 1880 Woolworths first sold manufactured Christmas tree ornaments, and they caught on very quickly.

So remember that as you gaze out upon our park and admire the Holiday tree, we have the Victorians to thank for many of the holiday traditions that we celebrate at this time of the year.

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

Neighborhood Holiday Decorating Contest

The Historic Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Association will be sponsoring a holiday decorating contest, open to all houses in the neighborhood.

Prizes will be awarded for first, second and third place, and the

contest will be judged on Saturday, December 20th by a local dignitary.

Decorations will be judged on the basis of overall aesthetics and holiday spirit as well as how they complement the overall appearance of the area.

Neighborhood Feature

Each month we try to spotlight a particular home in our neighborhood. This month our featured house is 30 West Green Street. This building has been divided up into apartments. According to the Maryland Historical Trust, 30 West Green Street was probably built by Jacob Morelock in the 1870's. Jacob Morelock bought his lot number 2 from George W. Matthews on June 20, 1870 for \$600.00. His creditors, William McKellip and Hashabiah Haines sold the same lot five years later to Joshua Sellman on April 28, 1875. The price they were able to bring for the lot was \$4000.00, which would indicate the presence of a new house.

The house was built in several sections. The main section is three stories tall and three bays

wide. The principal façade has the entrance door as the Eastern ground story bay. It is approached by two flights of wooden steps that are simply railed. The structure has lost its original front door, window shutters, and windows on the second floor. However, some of the original shutters remain on a covered porch located on the first floor. The original front door was a mid Victorian door consisting of two long vertical panels with a row of six lights in the upper third. The original door has been replaced with a standard metal door. The doorway is surrounded by sidelights and is slightly recessed. The whole is surrounded by plain white boards capped by a full cornice, which is supported by pelleted scroll brackets. The first and third bays on this façade are identical double hung sash windows with four over



This stately full three story structure sits at 30 West Green Street near Belle Grove Square, and currently contains several apartments.

four panes that have been covered with storm windows. The second floor windows have been replaced by metal double paned windows. The original black louvered shutters have been removed from the house.

The original other section is two stories tall under a gable room and has four regularly spaced four over four windows which are identical to those on the principal first and third floor façade. This section probably originally had a two tier

porch running along the length of its eastern façade. This porch has been covered now on the second floor by clapboard siding, which is pierced by two pairs of narrow four over four windows.

The north gale end of this section is marked by a small brick corbel capped chimney rising at the roof's peak flush with the original north wall. Since the house was built, other extensions have been added to the back of the structure.



Carroll Arts Center celebrates 71st birthday

by Will Abbott and Chuck Van Bibber

The Carroll Theater originally opened on Thanksgiving Day, November 25th 1937 at 2:00PM. It was fully decorated in the Art Modern style with extensive decorative plasterwork. The first films to be shown at the theater were “Ebb Tide” “Stella Dallas” and “Texas Trail”. The theater originally featured two small storefronts on either side of the lobby. A loan office and a hairdresser can be seen to occupy these spaces in a 1976 photo. There was no snack bar or concessions area in the original design, patrons would purchase candy at a candy store located directly across the street. Offices for the theater and the projection booth were located on a small second floor area over the lobby.

Sometime in the late 1960s to early 1970s the original neon marquee and ticket booth were removed. Sometime in the late 1970s the theater was “modernized”. The once 850+ capacity seating area was spit down the middle. A significant portion of the stage area and front of the theater was walled

over, and the first floor portion of the facade was stuccoed over. Nearly all of the original art deco decorative interior elements were removed. The plaster proscenium arch, cornice work and pilasters in the theater space were thankfully preserved when sound proofing fabric was hung overtop of it. The only other decorative element to survive the renovations was the lobby’s magnificent plaster cornice, which was preserved when a suspended ceiling was hung over it.

The theater continued to operate as a dual screen theater until the construction of the Regal Cinema 6 at nearby Cranberry Mall (approximate date 1992, although I am not sure that the Carroll closed immediately after the opening of the other cinema or if they operated at the same time for a while). At this time the Carroll Theater was closed and all of the remaining projection and sound equipment was removed. The building was sold to a local church that used it as annex Sunday school facility and warehouse.

During this time the building was severely neglected and in



The Carroll Arts Center, formerly the Carroll Theatre, was built in 1937. The theatre closed in the early 1990s and was restored in 2003. It is now used for movies and performing arts.

2002 on the verge of complete dilapidation the building was sold to the city of Westminster. Original city intentions were to demolish the building to make way for a public parking lot. Luckily a group of local residents stepped in and convinced the city to renovate the facility for the good of the community. Under the leadership of the Carroll County Arts Council the building was fully restored as a community arts center. The wall through the center of the theater was removed.

Approximately one third of the rear of the original theater space was walled off and divided into two floors. The theater plasterwork, which had suffered water damage from a leaking roof was restored and painted a period accurate (though not original color scheme). The former storefronts were turned into staff offices and patron restrooms. The second floor offices and projection booth area were tuned into two classrooms. The two-story addition occupying part of the original seating area was used to create two art galleries. The lobby’s plaster cornice, which had been hidden under ceiling tiles, was repaired and repainted in the original color scheme. All other walls and floors in the

building, except for the green terrazzo floor in the lobby, had to be completely replaced due to extensive damage.

Due to extensive damage and new codes, all remaining original theater seats were removed and replaced with 263 new seats. A modern stage lighting and sound system was installed and the stage thrust area was enlarged to better suit concerts and drama productions. Due to budget constraints a new 35mm projection system was rejected in favor of a digital video projection system. The theater was also equipped with a retractable screen to allow for mixed use of the stage. A new neon marquee, (the current marquee is not the original) reminiscent of the original was installed and the facade was restored to much the way it looked in 1937. On April 4, 2003 after more than a year of renovation the building was reopened to the public under the new name of the Carroll Arts Center.

Today the building is managed by the Carroll County Arts Council and serves the community as a home for gallery exhibits, drama productions, concerts, movies, and classes.



Westminster Public Works staff vacuum up Fall’s fallen leaves in part of an ongoing effort to beautify the city for the winter.

ARTICLE I – NAME

The name of this organization shall be the “Historic Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Association”, a Maryland non-profit corporation, hereinafter referred to as “the Association”.

ARTICLE II – AREA

The Association shall represent and provide services for that area roughly bounded by Cole Alley to the north, Union Alley between Green and Main Street to the east, Myer’s Alley to the south, and Chase Street to the west. However, the houses on the west side of Chase Street shall be included within the boundaries of the neighborhood. The area shall be explicitly defined to include the properties associated with the addresses number 1 to 25 Park Avenue, number 15 to 19 Chase Avenue, number 18 to 56 Bond Street, number 24 to 38 Green Street, the church properties of St. Paul’s United Church of Christ and Church of the Brethren on Belle Grove Square, and of the Belle Grove Square city park itself.

ARTICLE III – PURPOSE

Section 1: The Association shall be advisory to the Westminster City Council, Westminster Planning and Zoning Commission, Westminster City Police, Westminster School District, Parks Advisory Board, Carroll County Commissioners, and all other organizational bodies as requested or required, on matters affecting growth and development as well as all other factors affecting the livability of the area within the boundaries of the Association. However, such advisory communication is not in any manner limited to neighborhood plans and proposals with respect to land use, zoning, parks, open space and recreation, housing, school and community facilities, transportation and traffic, and other factors affecting the social and economic welfare of the members of the Association.

Section 2: The Association shall provide an open forum for constructive discussion and allow maximum citizen participation in the formation of public policy to all members of the Association.

Section 3: The Association shall improve open communication between Association members, community leaders, and elected and appointed officials.

Section 4: The Association shall promote, coordinate and conclude, in an orderly fashion, the business of the Association in order to protect and enhance the quality of life in the Historic Belle Grove Square Neighborhood and in Westminster as a whole.

ARTICLE IV – GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

Section 1: The Association shall be voluntary, non-partisan, non-commercial, and non-sectarian.

Section 2: The Association shall not discriminate or limit membership by race, religion, ethnic origin, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender or income.

Section 3: Membership shall be open to all residents, property owners and business licensees within the Association’s boundary.

Section 4: Members are not expected to pay fees; no dues shall be collected.

Section 5: The term “member” herein means general member unless specified as a Board member.

ARTICLE V – GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Section 1: Regular meetings of general members shall be held at least annually, with quarterly meetings being desirable.

Section 2: General membership meetings shall be held at the hour and day designated by the Board. The Board shall provide whenever possible at least ten (10) days notification to the general membership of the time, place and purpose of the general membership meeting.

Section 3: All meetings shall be open to the public. However, only members age 18 and over shall vote.

ARTICLE VI – BOARD MEETINGS

Section 1: There shall be a Board, elected by the general membership each year at the first general membership meeting of the calendar year. Nominations for Board members shall be accepted in October-December of each year for the following calendar year’s Board. The Board shall consist of between four and eight members: four elected officers plus as many as four Board members shall be elected at large and may also be committee chairpersons depending upon the number of active committees. All Board members shall serve a term of one year. Board vacancies after election may be filled for any unexpired term by majority vote of the general membership from those then nominated at any general membership meeting.

Section 2: The Board shall meet at least quarterly, at the hour and day designated by the Board.

Section 3: Board meetings shall be open to the public. However, only Board members age 18 and over shall vote.

ARTICLE VII – VOTING

Section 1: There shall be no voting by proxy.

Section 2: Each general member attending a general membership meeting or Board member attending a Board meeting, 18 years of age and over, shall be entitled to one (1) vote per voting opportunity.

Section 3: With the exception of votes to amend the By-Laws or to dissolve the organization, motions shall be passed and decisions made based on a simple majority vote, i.e. fifty percent (50%) plus one (1) of the votes cast.

Section 4: A quorum is duly constituted by those present.

Section 5: Robert’s Rules of Order, Revised shall govern the procedures of meetings when procedures are not covered by these By-Laws.

Section 6: Nothing contained herein shall preclude an officer or Board member from voting at a general membership meeting. However, the President shall only vote at a general membership meetings in the event of a tie.

ARTICLE VIII – OFFICERS

Section 1: The Association officers shall consist of a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Section 2: Nominations for officers shall be accepted in October-December of each year for the following calendar year's officers. All officers shall be elected at the first general membership meeting of the calendar year with the election of the Board and shall be installed at a general membership meeting in February. Each officer shall serve a term of one year. The total term of a single officer shall not exceed four (4) years in the same office. Should an elected officer be unable to fulfill or complete his/her term in office, the President shall, with the approval of the Board, appoint a replacement to complete the term. When the Board so elects, the Secretary and Treasurer positions may be combined.

Section 3: The President shall preside at all meetings of the Board and general membership, shall be responsible for the general supervision and direction of the Board and the Association, shall be responsible for the implementation of all policies defined by the By-Laws or approved by the Board, and shall appoint all committee members/chairpersons and be an ex-officio member of all committees. As aforementioned, the President shall vote in general membership meetings only in the event of a tie.

Section 4: The Vice-President shall in the absence of the President execute all the powers of the President, and perform other duties as assigned by the President. Should the President be unable to fulfill or complete his/her term in office, the Vice President shall assume that office and shall, with the approval of the Board, appoint a replacement to complete the term of Vice President.

Section 5: The Secretary shall record the minutes of all general membership and Board meetings and provide the Board with copies of said minutes, and maintain Association and membership records.

Section 6: The Treasurer shall maintain the financial records and be accountable for the funds of the Association. Upon request of any Association member, the Treasurer shall open for examination all financial records of the Association. The Board shall conduct an examination of the Association financial records annually. The Fiscal Year of the Association shall be January 1st through December 31st. A motion for acceptance shall be made regarding the condition of the examination with appropriate recommendations.

Section 7: In the event a checking account is established in the name of the Association and for its business purposes only, all checks shall require two signatures. Only Association officers designated by the Board shall have the authority to sign a check.

ARTICLE IX – INDEMNIFICATION

The Association shall indemnify any present or former Board member or officer against any and all liabilities, judgments and expenses arising out of his or her service to the Association, except as to matters in which they may be judged by the Board

to be liable for negligence or misconduct in the performance of their duties to the Association.

ARTICLE X – REMOVAL

Should the extraordinary need arise, an officer or Board member may be removed by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the general membership attending any general membership meeting.

ARTICLE XI – COMMITTEES

Section 1: The Board shall have the power to establish committees, appoint members thereto, and establish duties. The President shall supervise, and be an ex-officio member of all committees.

Section 2: The purpose of a committee is to examine an issue(s) and make a recommendation to the Board, and take such action as directed by the Board.

ARTICLE XII – FUNDING

Section 1: Voluntary contributions shall be accepted.

Section 2: The Board may authorize activities to raise funds for the Association as appropriate.

ARTICLE XIII – AMENDMENTS

Section 1: These By-Laws may only be amended by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the general membership attending a general membership meeting, provided that four (4) weeks advance written notice has been given of the vote to the general membership.

Section 2: Public notice of the proposed By-Law changes to be voted on shall be included in notification of the upcoming general membership meeting.

ARTICLE XIV – GOVERNING LAW

The laws of the State of Maryland shall govern all actions of the Association.

ARTICLE XV – ADOPTION

Upon initial adoption of these By-Laws, the Association shall take nominations and hold an immediate election for initial Board members and initial officers to serve a special initial term to end with regular elections in the coming January, or to also include the following year if adoption of the By-Laws takes place in October or later.

ARTICLE XVI – DISSOLUTION

Section 1: The Association may only be dissolved by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the general membership attending a general membership meeting, provided that four (4) weeks advance written notice has been given of the vote to the general membership.

Section 2: Should the Association be thus dissolved, after all financial obligations have been satisfied, any remaining Association assets shall be disbursed by majority vote of the Board so as to benefit the Historic Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Association community.

Neighborhood Group Gets Organized

Neighborhood residents gathered on November 20, 2008 and adopted bylaws for our neighborhood group. Only two minor changes were identified at the meeting - one to address the fact that because the bylaws were adopted on the last meeting of the year, we would otherwise be having elections on two consecutive meetings, and the other to clarify the boundary enumerate the properties included in the neighborhood's service area. With these minor adjustments, the bylaws were approved by unanimous consent.

Four officers were elected to serve for the organization's first year: Bruce DeVault - President, Laurie Walters - Vice-President, Eileen Fisher Churchill - Secretary, and Dan Hoff - Treasurer.

The group discussed filing for non-profit status and it was decided to do so. A committee was also formed to help with the signage project.

The neighborhood association will next meet again on the third Thursday in January, January 15th,



Belle Grove Square neighborhood residents gathered November 20, 2008 for the second Belle Grove Square neighborhood meeting.

2009 at 7:00pm at St. Paul's at the corner of Bond and Green Streets

- all are welcome invited to attend, meet your neighbors, and join in!

Holiday Home Tour Coming Up Sat., Dec. 6!

The City of Westminster Historic District Commission, in conjunction with The Carroll County Historical Society, is sponsoring the 2008 Historic Westminster Holiday House Tour to be held on Saturday, December 6, 2008 from 3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the historic West End Neighborhood of Westminster.

The mission of the tour is to

promote and display the historic nature of Westminster's older neighborhoods while building community through the strengthening of relationships and resources.

In accordance with this mission, McDaniel College and 14 homeowners from the West End Neighborhood will open their doors to share their own holiday

celebrations with neighbors near and far. Live performances from local musical groups will add additional local flavor to the celebration.

These performances include: Carroll County's Children's Chorus, Westminster Municipal Band, and Winters Mill Vocal Ensemble, to name a few.

All of the West End Neighborhood homes on the tour were built between the 1840's and the 1940's, and this year's tour will feature a special look inside the President's House at McDaniel College, built in 1889. The \$10 ticket price (\$12 at the door) includes access to all 14 homes as well as the Little Baker Chapel, the Harrison House, and the President's House at McDaniel College.

Tour-goers will receive a tour booklet, special offers from downtown restaurants, and refreshments at the Harrison House.

A shuttle service between houses

is also available. Tickets for the tour are available at Westminster City Offices at 56 West Main Street, Carroll Arts Center and selected businesses in downtown Westminster.

Guests are encouraged to continue the community celebration of the holidays in Westminster on December 6, 2008 with several other family friendly events: Starting with a visit with Santa on Locust Lane from noon to 4 p.m., enjoy the talents of your community at the "Festival of Wreaths" at the Carroll Arts Center from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. followed by the music of the Pennsylvania Opry at the "Country Gospel & Christmas Show" with shows at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Finish your evening with a stroll down Main Street to visit local Downtown shops open late during "Starlight Shopping" until 10:00 p.m.

For more information, please contact Tim Rogers at 410-848-4628.



Members of the Westminster historical preservation board, Belle Grove Square residents and volunteers from Union Bridge help assemble luminiers in advance of the holiday home tour.

19th Century Sales

by Mary Ann Ashcraft

Will your family receive an HDTV from Santa this Christmas? Perhaps you will give someone a cell phone, wrapped a box of Legos for a grandchild or send an Amazon gift certificate to a person who is hard to please. Whatever you give or receive, it will likely be quite different from the presents of long ago.

According to an Internet source, the average annual wage for manufacturing workers in the U.S. in 1900 was about \$435, or roughly \$8.37 per week, so many families watched their pennies as they bought gifts and planned their holiday entertaining.

Looking at Westminster newspaper advertisements from the 1890s, you are first struck with the fact that merchants didn't start promoting holiday merchandise until December. Theo. Derr & Son offered dress goods, coats and wraps for ladies and children, shoes, hosiery and underwear "all at Special Prices for Christmas Week." This firm wasn't luring customers into the store with bargains which began weeks or months ahead of time. In addition to clothing, it suggested gifts of down pillows,

muffs and furs, carpet sweepers and silk or linen handkerchiefs. A husband who couldn't afford both might be left with the dilemma of buying his wife either a carpet sweeper or a muff!

Derr's advertisement also mentioned "Japanese Art Goods, this line includes many beautiful presents, all useful and ornamental." Was Japan supplying the U.S. with the kinds of articles which China does today? Did the bases of ceramic knick-knacks read "Made in Japan" during that era?

Matthews & Myers, located at 45 East Main Street "nearly opposite Catholic Church," politely encouraged holiday shoppers in 1893 with the invitation, "Our Prices are no higher at this season, and it will pay you to examine our Beautiful Selection if you wish to buy." The firm carried etchings, pastels, engravings and photo frames along with albums, toilet cases, manicure sets and a complete line of novelties.

A jewelry store owned by A. H. Wentz offered gold and silver watches, glasses, and "everything in the jeweler's line." U.L. Reaver's shop sold "boots, shoes, hats,



The first snow of the season falls a few days before Thanksgiving. The snow melted about 15 minutes after this picture was taken.

trunks, valises and umbrellas, suitable for holiday presents." Prof. John T. Royer was the source for musical instruments and sheet music while A. C. Strasburger sold luxury items such as fine whiskies, wines, brandies, tobacco and cigars.

John J. Reese's grocery store was a source for anyone who gave delicacies as gifts. His selection of fruits, nuts and candies would make most mouths water. Figs were 10-15 cents per pound; almonds, English walnuts and mixed nuts were 15 cents a pound and 7 O'clock coffee cost 25 cents. If you decided to make mince meat pies, the filling cost 12 ½ cents a pound. Oranges or other fruit could be purchased to put in Christmas stockings. Mr.

Reese also carried hams, spices, molasses and other staples for holiday cooking.

Although grocery stores like that of John Reese didn't advertise turkeys, an 1893 ad showed they were selling for 10 cents a pound and chickens cost about a penny less. Eggs averaged 25 cents a dozen; butter was approximately the same per pound.

Stop a minute to figure how far you could have stretched your weekly paycheck about 100 years ago to put presents under the tree and Christmas dinner on the table!

This article first appeared in Carroll County Times, December 30, 2007.



Westminster residents gather along Main Street to witness the Tree Lighting Ceremony and Holiday Parade Sat., Nov. 29, 2008.



The holiday decorative lights come on as the sun falls at dusk over Belle Grove Square shortly after the city's tree lighting ceremony.