



HISTORIC
BELLE GROVE
SQUARE

HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD

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**Be sure to join us
for the next**

**Belle Grove Square
Neighborhood
Meeting**

**Thursday, April
16th, 2009**

**7:00pm at St.
Paul's UCC, Bond
and Green Streets!**

See you There!

Happy Valentine's Day!

by Erika Dowell

Valentine's Day is a holiday with a long history. Though it bears a saint's name, its origins seem more firmly rooted in pagan celebrations of the beginning of spring than in the history of its martyred namesakes. Valentine's Day traditions are wide-ranging, but have long involved the exchange of some love token or small gift with one's valentine. In 18th century England and North America, these exchanges often took the form of hand-made valentine cards. By the 19th century, these traditions expanded. Home-made cards were widely replaced by commercially produced valentine cards, and the cards were sent not only to one special valentine, but often to a wider circle of friends and relations.

At first, these valentines weren't cards at all. Decorated writing papers had become popular in the years before the turn of the century, and by 1800 decorated papers appeared with Valentine's

Day themes.

When uniform postal rates for the entire United Kingdom were established in 1840, the English Valentine card tradition began in earnest. Decorated papers were still the norm at this time. The papers were folded sheets in quarto size, commonly decorated with embossed borders as well as pictorial scenes. The sheet would



One of the first Victorian era Valentine Cards, from the collection of the Lilly Library

be folded and sealed with wax for mailing.

Over the next thirty years, Valentine cards were made in great numbers and variety. The quality of the cards was as variable as the themes they represented. Though the dominant theme for Valentines would always be love, comic and even insulting Valentines were also common.

The design of Valentines also became more complex, even as the size of the cards diminished. Feathers, beads, bits of fabric, and other regalia were used to decorate cards. Layers of mesh and lace-paper were layered over colored silks to show them to the greatest effect. Portions of cards were moveable, revealing hidden messages of love and affection.

Embossed papers used a die-stamping method to impress a design into paper. Later, lace-paper was made using similar dies.

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My hero - Punxsutawney Phil

by Mitchell Edmondson

As I look out my window, it's hard to imagine that in the next few weeks winter's icy grip will start to give way to Spring's warm breezes. Flowerbeds that are currently covered with ice and snow will soon be covered with blooming tulips and daffodils. And how do I know this will all come to pass? I know this to be true because Groundhog Day is right around the corner.

In western countries in the Northern Hemisphere the official first day of Spring is about six weeks after Groundhog Day, on March 20th or March 21st. About 1,000 years ago, before the adoption of the Gregorian calendar when the date of the equinox drifted in the Julian calendar, the spring equinox fell on March 16th instead. This was exactly six weeks after February 2nd, assuming that the equinox marked the first day of spring in certain medieval cultures, as it does now in western countries, Groundhog Day occurred exactly

six weeks before spring. Therefore, if the groundhog saw his shadow on Groundhog Day there would be six more weeks of winter. If he didn't, there would be 42 more days of winter. In other words, the Groundhog Day tradition may have begun as a bit of folk humor.

The tradition of Groundhog day in the United States can trace its origins back the 1700's. German settlers brought with them a tradition known as Candlemas Day. Candlemas Day came at the mid-point between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox. Superstition held that if the weather was fair, the second half of winter would be stormy and cold. If the sun came out February 2, halfway between winter and spring, it meant six more weeks of wintry weather.

From Germany:

*For as the sun shines on Candlemas Day,
So far will the snow swirl until May.
For as the snow blows on Candlemas Day,
So far will the sunshine before May.*

In the United States the tradition may also derive from a Scottish poem:

*As the light grows longer
The cold grows stronger
If Candlemas be fair and bright
Winter will have another flight*

*If Candlemas be cloud and snow
Winter will be gone and not come again
A farmer should on Candlemas day
Have half his corn and half his hay
On Candlemas day if thorns hang a drop
You can be sure of a good pea crop*

If the sun made an appearance on Candlemas Day, an animal would cast a shadow, thus predicting six more weeks of winter. In Germany, the custom involved watching a badger for the shadow. In Pennsylvania, the groundhog, upon waking from mid-Winter hibernation, was selected as the replacement.

Punxsutawney held its first

Valentines cards

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Instead of simply stamping the paper, the paper was pressed into the die, then the raised portion carefully sanded off to create delicate lace-like holes in the paper. Makers of these fancy papers not only made their own Valentines, but sold paper to others firms who used it to create their own designs. Thus the name on the embossed paper on a Valentine card may or may not reflect the actual maker of the card in its final form.

By the 1870's, influenced by trends in popular Christmas cards, the fashion in Valentine cards shifted away from the delicate lace themes

Groundhog Day in the 1800s. The first official trek to Gobbler's Knob was made on February 2, 1887. So the story goes, Punxsutawney Phil was named after King Phillip. Prior to being called Phil, he was called Br'er Groundhog.

So, at 7:25 on February 2, 2009 Punxsutawney Phil will come out of his burrow on Gobbler's Knob - in front of thousands of followers from all over the world - to predict the weather for the rest of winter. Even if he sees his shadow, we can huddle together and make it through another six weeks of winter weather. Either way Spring is just around the corner.

to a more pictorial look.

Pictorial "pop-up" Valentines are a trend in later Victorian greeting cards. Some are simple cards, not much more complicated than earlier examples using paper springs to create a 3-dimensional effect. More substantial cards create a real sense of depth when opened.

Though Valentine cards remained consistently popular in the United States, their popularity sagged in England by the 1880's. Only after World War II was the tradition revived.

Society hosts box lunch

The Historical Society of Carroll County is sponsoring a Box Lunch discussion of Sex and the Civil War on Tuesday, February 10th. Admission is \$1.00 for HSCC members; \$4.00 for non-members. The event is being held at the American Legion, corner of Green and Sycamore streets. Bring lunch - dessert and beverages provided - or buy lunch at the Legion. Lunches must be ordered by 11:30; call the Legion at (410) 857-7953 to order. Please contact the Historical Society at (410) 848-6494 for information about the many events offered during the year.



Groundhog Punxsutawney Phil, left, with his handler Ben Hughes in advance of his moment in the spotlight.

How to reach us:

Historic Belle Grove
Square Neighborhood

443.293.7203

1 Park Avenue
Westminster, MD 21157

email: newsletter@
bellegrovesquare.org

www.bellegrovesquare.org

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Geogaching trail cuts through Belle Grove Square

by Jennifer Jiggetts

Mount Airy resident John Earp grabbed a walking stick, pulled out his handheld global positioning system device and mapped his coordinates.

The search was on.

He trekked through wet leaves, a rocky path and a barren forest along a railroad track before finding his “cache,” or prize, that was hidden along a crevice in a boulder.

Earp is one of the many geocachers in the county who will benefit from a new geocache program that the Maryland Municipal League has organized.

The MML launched in January a geocache trail aimed at increasing economic growth in the state, officials said.

You may have noticed many visitors in the neighborhood square lately holding small handheld GPS locators and looking around as if searching for something – it’s because our own Belle Grove Square had the honor to be chosen as one of the locations highlighted along the way.

Linda Burrell, manager of member relations and education for the MML, said officials there have noticed the boom in the activity called geocaching, where participants called geocachers find caches or trinkets at specific locations.

MML officials are partnering with 78 towns and cities in the state to form the Maryland Municipal League Geocache Trail. Most of Carroll County’s municipalities have signed on to participate in the program.

“It taps into the rapidly growing

high-tech tourist trade that is not limited to any particular age group,” Burrell wrote in an e-mail. “Geocache tourism provides cities and towns with a rare opportunity to create big bang for very few bucks.”

Through MML’s program, a geo coin will be given to the first 500 geocachers as an incentive for locating at least two municipal caches in each district, Burrell said.

Geocachers must pick up a passport at any of the designated county visitor or tourism centers to get started.

When participating, geocachers must use a stamp in the cache on their passports and write in the cache code word. After at least two municipal caches in each district are found, geocachers may return to one of the county visitor centers and have their passports validated.

The only cost for a town or city to participate is the purchase of a plastic container to keep the cache in, a log book, rubber stamp and whatever trinkets or pamphlets they need. The individual towns are responsible for maintaining their caches, and if they don’t, damaged or missing caches would be reported, Burrell said. The MML would then contact the town in that instance.

Geocaching has been steadily gaining popularity for some time in Carroll County.

Jeff Degitz, county director of recreation and parks, said he has been getting calls from residents about geocaching for several years. More people are getting access to the activity and inquiring about the county’s role in geocaching, he said.

Although the county doesn’t have



A visiting geocacher from Ellicott City searches for hidden treasure in Belle Grove Square park January 4, 2009.

a written policy for regulating geocaching, Degitz said officials do have several regulations that they discuss with geocachers.

First, they tell geocachers not to put food in caches because animals will find it. Second, Degitz said recreation officials want people to ask for permission to hide stuff on county property so park officials can give geocachers tips about good geocaching sites.

And finally, if geocachers have to dig a cache up, county officials ask that they restore the area.

Degitz said the county hasn’t looked into officially promoting the activity but may add something to the Web site in the future to answer general questions.

“We view it as a positive thing because it gets people outside and in the parks,” Degitz said.

Susan Kelley, president of the Maryland Geocaching Society, said the state has one of the biggest groups of geocachers in the country.

Kelley said geocaching started in 2000 on the West Coast when President George W. Bush allowed

the public to pick up satellite signals by stopping the intentional degradation of the GPS signals, according to a press release.

Its popularity has spread because more efficient technology has been introduced to people, she said.

“In the past few years, it’s really caught on because GPSs are more affordable and people feel more comfortable using them,” she said.

Kelley said geocaching offers something for all ages. Children, especially, take a liking to it, though.

“To the kids, it’s just like an Easter egg hunt,” she said.

Earp said he first read about geocaching in a newspaper article about three years ago. After purchasing a GPS device, he fell in love with the activity.

He said he usually geocaches alone because he likes the serenity.

“When you’re out here doing this, you’re not thinking about a lot,” he said. “It’s a way to get away from everything.”

Editor’s Note: this article adapted from its original form in Carroll County Times, 23 Dec 2008.



Neighborhood Spotlight

Each month we will try to spotlight one of the beautiful homes that grace our neighborhood. This month we are highlighting the Henry Morelock House - 34 West Green.

According to the Maryland Historical Trust, 34 West Green can trace its origins back to the mid 1800's when Henry Morelock bought the lot from George W. Matthews, the founder of our neighborhood. When Mr. Henry Morelock decided to build his house, he decided not to build in the then fashionable Second Empire Style, but instead chose to follow precedents of 100 years and nearly duplicated the house built next door. The traditionalism of this house is also significant in the way it works with the other buildings around the park. According to the Maryland Historical Trust, many of the homes, especially those along Park Avenue are built in a more flamboyant and up-to-date



manner, but 34 and 30 West Green show firmly what styles once dominated Westminster.

In scale in proportion and in feeling, 34 West Green Street is identical at least in its principal section. This section is 3 bays wide and 3 stories tall and gabled roofed. Similarities continue down to such details as the eaves

brick corbelling, to the 2/2 paning of the windows, and to the door decoration. One interesting variation that makes this building rare in the city is that it has a 2-½ foot tall watertable. The top of the watertable, which rises above the coursed fieldstone foundation, slopes into the main wall of the

house via two rows of header bricks.

34 West Green Stands proud at the end of Park Avenue and is a wonderful example of homes that can trace their origins back to the beginning of our great historic Belle Grove Neighborhood.

February Gardening Tips

by Mitchell Edmondson

With Spring right around the corner, it is now time to start getting ready for the sun to shine a little brighter and the temperatures to rise. Per the USDA Hardiness Zone Map, Westminster is in Zone 7A. The average low temperature for February is around 25 degrees and the high temperature is around 44 degrees. February is also the driest month of the year with about 2.37 inches of precipitation.

Folks in our zone can start to prune trees and shrubs, both ornamentals and fruit. Now is a good time to check flowerbeds for plants that may have heaved and replace mulch as needed. February is also a good time to check outside plants and trees for animal damage. Some flowering branches can be cut for forcing indoors and holly bushes can be rejuvenated with a

hard pruning. Evergreens should be checked for signs of damage due to loss of moisture. If you want to get a head start on your garden planting, February is also a great time to start indoors the seeds of cool season vegetables and flowers.

Since the ground is frozen and our last frost is still a couple of months away, it will be quite a while before we can start transplanting live plants into our flower beds. Until then, get your seeds ready and start planning what you are going to plant this spring.

Remember, your neighbors in Belle Grove Square maintain two of the flowerbeds in the park and we are always looking for folks who have plants to donate. If you have perennials that need thinning or any other plants you would like to donate, please drop them by my house at 1 Park Avenue.



Ever wonder what happens to the tree every January? It's no easy task getting it set up and back down but well worth it for the whole city to enjoy; the break down this year is shown here involving a bucket truck, a chainsaw, several utility trucks, a wood chipper and staff.