



HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD

VOLUME 2 ~ ISSUE 5 ~ 2009 MAY



History of the Centennial Marker in the park

Neighborhood Spotlight

Church of the Brethren Neighborhood Gardening

Be sure to join us for the

Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Picnic / Potluck

Thursday July 23rd, 2009

6:00pm - 8:00pm in Belle Grove Square Park

See you There!

Summer Picnic in the Park

by Mitchell Edmondson

I remember when I was a kid, my sisters and I would spend countless hours outside playing while my parents sat on the front porch and visited with family and friends. It was just natural that we would gravitate outside and watch the sun go down and feel the coolness of a summer evening creep in with the nighttime shadows. I have so many fond memories of times spent chasing fireflies and running barefoot through cool fresh cut grass.

Times have changed a lot since we were kids. Today we can't open a newspaper, watch the news, or read news online without being exposed to the toll crime has taken on our cities and neighborhoods. Luckily, we live in Westminster and enjoy a community that has very little crime when compared to the larger cities such as Baltimore or Washington D.C. Common sense dictates that we should always be aware of our surroundings and be suspicious of odd behavior or

activity in our neighborhood.

There's nothing more important than protecting your family, but isolation doesn't equal protection. Connecting with your neighbors not only lets you know the personalities that surround you, it also provides you with many positive and helpful resources in times of need. Neighbors can help watch your home when you are away, share a few kind words of encouragement during a tough remodel, or just say hello to help brighten your day. There



Did you know? Westminster was first in the nation with free rural postal service.

is no better security than in a neighborhood where residents spend time out in their front yards and watch each other's property like they watch their own.

You may wonder why I am talking about meeting neighbors and looking out for each other. I bring up this topic to help announce a neighborhood picnic in Belle Grove Square Park that we have planned for Thursday, July 23, 2009.

Historic Belle Grove Square board members will be supplying the hot dogs and hamburgers and it is hoped that each household will bring a dish to share with fellow neighbors. This will be a great time to meet your neighbors and to also enjoy some great food in the park. So, mark your calendars and plan on an evening of fun in the park on July 23rd!

If you would like to help with the planning and preparation of the party, please contact us at 443-293-7203. Look forward to seeing you in the park for the picnic this July!

Mystery of the Centennial Marker

by Mitchell Edmondson

Springtime is a great time for getting outdoors and discovering hidden gems in our town. On a walk several weeks ago I noticed a small square stone in our park at the corner of Bond and Green Streets. I have walked past this stone

many times and never gave it much thought. For some reason on that particular day I decided to give it a closer look. In many ways it is a plain marker that appeared to be a part of the Centennial celebration. It has names carved into one side and "To Commemorate the Centennial of American Independence" carved

on another side.

I knew there had to be some history behind this marker so I decided to pay a visit to the local Carroll County Historical Society. After wandering through "The Democratic Advocate" I came across an article that shed some light on

the history of the stone marker. I edited out two poems that were read during the celebration. I will include them in the July edition of our newsletter.

After researching the history of our park's marker, I found it very interesting that the last sentences of the story spoke of the hope that the stone would "be held in everlasting remembrances." It seems that at least for now our former mayor's wishes are being followed.

Planting a Memorial Tree and Stone

After reading of the Centennial celebrations of many places, I do not think a more beautiful ceremony adorned the glorious 4th anywhere than our own people performed by planting a Centennial Memorial Tree and stone in our public square. To Messrs. D. N. Henning and James H. Diffenbaugh the credit of this beautiful idea and its execution under the auspices of the City Council belong. The tree is one of the span oak variety and looks thrifty. The stone is an American shield of spotless American Marble, bearing the usual stripes with thirty seven stars surrounding this inscription: 1776 July 4th 1876.

It rests on a brown stone base on the front of which is the name of P. H. Irwin, Mayor, and on one side are the names of the Committee who

conceived the idea and carried it into execution: D. N. Henning, James H. Diffenbaugh and B. Frank Crouse. The whole was the work of our promising young sculpture Mr. John Beaver, who made it in a day and a half.

Promptly at 6 o'clock P. M. the tree was planted, a number of our citizens who were present, including the Mayor and several of the Councilmen requested the privilege of throwing a few shovelfuls of dirt around it.

Mr. Irwin briefly spoke the following:

My Fellow Citizens: - As the representative of your city authorities it is my duty as well as pleasure to sanction and accept this your action, and my only regret is that this duty was not committed to an abler head than mine. We celebrate today the grandest event in our country's history, and we cannot say or do too much to commemorate it

and keep it fresh in the minds of our people. One hundred years ago three millions of people were struggling for a national existence. Today forty millions of people send up their glad shouts from a free and independent nation. May this tree which you have planted, like our glorious republic flourish and grow strong, striking its roots in the hearts of the people. May it widely spread out its branches, affording protection to those who seek its shelter as does our glorious country to the weary, friendless exile of every nation. Watered and nourished by the life giving dews and sunshine of heaven, may it grow stronger and stronger, so that it may be able to withstand the storms of nature, as has our noble ark of liberty withstood the fierce tempests of the passions of men. May the fruit of this tree, like the influences which go forth from this land of freedom, fall upon fruitful soils, and other trees grow from this, and other republics from out of those influences, until liberty is proclaimed

throughout the world. Again fellow citizens we accept this tree from your hands and acknowledge your work to be an act of the city, since it was authorized by the authorities of the city, but at the same time, gentlemen of the committee we thank you most cordially for the beautiful idea of planting this Centennial Tree, which originated with you, and which has done so much for the commemoration of this day.

At the conclusion of the ceremony it began to rain and further ceremonies had to be abandoned. This is certainly an interesting feature of our Centennial celebration and deserves to be held in everlasting remembrances. The tree and stone are now the property of all our citizens to watch and defend and we hope any attempt to injure either will be properly reported and punished.

*The Democratic Advocate
July 15, 1876*



City staff, the city arborist Eric Schlitzer and Mayor Thomas Ferguson all made their appearance April 2, 2009 for the city's Arbor Day ceremony to spruce up Belle Grove Square Park by planting three new flowering cherry trees. The mayor realized early on that Belle Grove Square neighbor Nicholas (photographed above with shovel and watering can) had it under control and didn't need any further assistance.

Neighborhood Spotlight



The Centennial marker was placed in Belle Grove Square Park to commemorate our nation's 100th anniversary.

Belle Grove Square Neighborhood April Board Meeting Held

During the April 16th meeting of the board of Historic Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Association, it was decided that new neighbors in our neighborhood should be given some type of welcome gift from the group.

One neighborhood resident has volunteered to help with this idea and is looking for others to help either by donating welcome gifts/cards, or help by identifying new arrivals into our neighborhood. If you would like to help donate or know of someone new to our neighborhood, please contact Mitchell Edmondson at 443-293-7203.

Currently we are waiting on the City of Westminster to finish up their sign ordinance rule. Once that is finished, we will have a better idea of what kind of signs we can install and can get some quotes for the cost. It is estimated that we will need five or six signs to mark the entrances into our neighborhood.

Neighborhood Association President Bruce DeVault also announced that our neighborhood is now officially incorporated as a Maryland non-profit organization.

The house at 9 Park Avenue, on Belle Grove Square in Westminster, is part of the large scale development that Mayor Oscar D. Gilbert made to this section of the city beginning in the 1890s. The square was given to the city in 1877 by George W. Matthews, who had laid out lots around it in what was known as Matthews Addition. Gilbert bought lots 27, 28, and 29 in the 1890s; lots 27 and 29 already had brick dwellings on them.

By mid-1897 Gilbert had added on to 11 Park Avenue and constructed 7 Park Avenue on part of lot 28. The houses he was building and remodeling, though substantial, well-finished single family dwellings, were built as rental properties. In November 1898 the local papers noted that Gilbert



was again building a house on the square. It was completed in 1899, according to the insurance underwriters rate book for Westminster, at 9 Park Avenue. It was squeezed in between the existing buildings at 7 and 11 Park Avenue.

Like the even larger house at 7 Park Avenue, this building was a large Queen Anne with refined details including decorative brackets and frieze on the exterior, and pocket doors and a built-in hall seat at the foot of the stairway on the interior. The house was probably a pattern-book plan, and has similarities (especially the sunburst pattern in the bay gable)

to R.W. Shoppell's designs, which were popular at this time in Carroll County. Beginning in the 1880s, plan books brought national styles to towns in Carroll County in ever-increasing numbers, until the local vernacular was completely abandoned by about 1910.

Denton Gehr purchased 9 Park Avenue from Gilbert in 1921, and apparently lived there for several years, eventually selling it in 1934. Gehr is best known for having embezzled close to \$30,000 from the First National Bank, and funds from the Westminster Cemetery Company, for which he was sentenced to four years at North Eastern Penitentiary in 1938.

<p>J. W. DEHOFF, M. D. Homeopathic Physician and Surgeon, UNION BRIDGE, CARROLL CO., MD. may 13-1y</p>
<p>DR. J. H. BILLINGSLEA IS still actively engaged in the practice of Medicine. Office two doors east of the residence of John L. Reifsnider, Esq. aug 19-tf</p>
<p>M. B. SETTLE, ATTORNEY-AT-LAW, WESTMINSTER, MD. Office with Charles B. Roberts, directly opposite Court House. aug14-75</p>
<p>GEO. W. MATTHEWS, J. P. OFFICE ON MAIN ST., SECOND DOOR WEST OF COURT STREET. WESTMINSTER, MD. may 6-tf</p>

The ads above appeared in the Democratic Advocate in 1876, when the nation turned 100 years old. Note the ad from George W. Matthews, our neighborhood founder who donated Belle Grove Square to the city. Note also Dr. J. H. Billingslea, who is "still actively engaged in the practice of medicine" although apparently this was unclear.



As most of you know, at the edge of our neighborhood is a shelter for homeless families. The building is pictured here in 1978 - since that time it has undergone extensive remodeling.



Much to the delight of kids in the neighborhood, most of the work on the new playground equipment in King's Park is finished. On April 24, 2009, city officials held a grand re-opening ceremony.

Church of the Brethren

The Pipe Creek Church of the Brethren purchased an English Baptist church building on the current site at Bond Street and Park Place in 1879 for its members who lived in Westminster. In 1885, Westminster became part of the Meadow Branch Church of the Brethren.

The Westminster building was replaced with a larger one in 1932. The Westminster Church of the Brethren was incorporated as a

separate congregation on April 7, 1937. Once incorporated, George A. Early became the first elder and A. Stauffer Curry its first pastor.

A two-story education building was built in 1959. In 2006, much of the church and education building received renovation work.

The Westminster Church of the Brethren is a part of the Church of the Brethren denomination, founded in 1708 in Germany.



On Park Place between Park Avenue and Bond Streets, Westminster Church of the Brethren is one of the two prominent churches that anchor the Historic Belle Grove Square Neighborhood area.

Neighborhood Gardening in May

by Mitchell Edmondson

I would suspect that some of you have gotten spring fever as I have and have already planted a few seasonal annual plants in the ground. However, according to the Maryland Cooperative Extension, the frost-free date for Central Maryland is May 10 – think Mother's Day! Plant all warm season annual plants at this time.

Purchase stocky, transplants with healthy, white root systems. Remove any flower buds or opened flowers when you get them home to hasten root establishment. This will help direct the plants' energies to root development and will result in more productive plants. Gently breakup the roots of root-bound transplants. Summer annual bulbs like gladiolus, tuberous begonias, cannas, caladium and dahlias can be planted now. Perennial plants can be safely divided and moved at this time. Pinch the blooms off flower and vegetable transplants before you set them out. This will help direct the plants' energies to root development and will result in more productive plants. Gently breakup the roots of root-bound transplants.

Begin setting out transplants of warm season crops like squash, peppers, eggplant and tomato. Mix in a handful of either finely ground calcitic or hydrated lime with the planting soil of each pepper and tomato transplant to prevent blossom-end rot. Set up your tomato support system after transplanting. Very tall tomato transplants can be laid horizontally in a shallow trench with the growing tip gently bent into vertical position. Roots will grow all along the buried stem. Corn, beans and other tender crops can also be planted. Hold off on planting pumpkins until mid June so that coloring and harvest occur closer to Halloween. Be sure not to plant tender annual plants like basil and

eggplant until after the last frost date. Parsley is slow to germinate and basil should not be directly sown in the garden until the soil has thoroughly warmed.

May is also a good time to lay down organic mulches, like pine bark, to moderate soil temperature and suppress weed growth in flowerbeds.

Consider growing annual vines like cardinal climber, hyacinth bean, morning glory, etc. to cover fences, gazebos and trellises. Hops are a fast growing perennial that can be planted now and allowed to climb on a fence or trellis. Or try planting a hardy climbing rose in a sunny spot against a building or fence.

As everyone has probably noticed, the new trees have been planted and the park benches have returned. Soon the city will fill the fountain and we will once again get to enjoy the sound of refreshing water splashing in our neighborhood fountain.

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

Letters to the editor
are welcomed. Letters
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for space or clarity.

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