



HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD

VOLUME 2 ~ ISSUE 9 ~ 2009 SEPTEMBER



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September Events:

Service in the Park
Sun Sep. 6th,
9:30am

Fall Fest
Sep. 24th - 27th

Next Neighborhood Meeting
Thurs. Oct. 8th

Autumn Around the Corner

by Mitchell Edmondson

As someone who loves to put a few seeds into the warm spring soil and watch plants shoot forth from the ground, September and the autumnal equinox signal the coming end of my vegetable and flower beds. According to Wikipedia the word autumn comes from the Old French word *autompne*.

Before the 16th century, harvest was the term usually used to refer to the season. However, as more people gradually moved from working the land to living in towns the word harvest lost its reference to the time of year and came to refer only to the actual activity of reaping, and fall, as well as autumn, began to replace it as a reference to the season.

During the 17th century, English immigration to the colonies in North America was at its peak, and the new settlers took their language with them. While the term fall gradually became

obsolescent in Britain, it became the more common term in North America.

Although the days will grow shorter and the breeze will start to take on a chill, September is a great time to get out and enjoy

some great fall events. One of our city's most enjoyed events is the annual Fall Fest held downtown. An evening parade signals the start of the festival and great food, music, and carnival attractions are available to be enjoyed by all who gather in the park for a few hours of fun..

As a tribute to our annual Fall Fest, in this month's newsletter I am including an article about the Chautauqua festivals that were held throughout the country around the turn of the last century. A Chautauqua festival was held in a field very near our neighborhood.

September also was the month in which Westminster had one of its first encounters with the Civil War. This month's newsletter includes an article describing the event that occurred on a September evening in 1862.

So, as the days grow shorter and the north wind starts to blow, take the time to get out and enjoy some of our area's fall attractions.



A Victorian Currier & Ives postcard depicts Autumn, 1871

Westminster Chautauqua

In the last newsletter, an article about the early history of Westminster stated that the Chautauqua Circus used to set up a tent along Bond Street around one hundred years ago. According to information provided by the Smith-Zimmerman Heritage Museum, the Chautauqua was a social and cultural phenomenon that began in 1874 and expanded and permeated rural American until the mid 1920s. Going to Chautauqua meant music, laughter, relaxation and stimulation for millions of rural Americans. When Chautauqua came to town, there was entertainment for the whole family and the entire community.

Chautauqua was the product of John H. Vincent of Camden, New Jersey, a young minister. In 1872, Vincent, then editor of the Sunday School Journal undertook to train Sunday school teachers by bringing them together every summer for all day study. His idea for a “summer school” to be held in the outdoors grew in popularity and a home was found at a little used campsite on the shores of Lake Chautauqua, New York. Young people were invited for study, bonfires, good meals and lodging. It was a huge success and was soon expanded



An early Chautauqua program

to include not only religious and Biblical study but a wide range of literacy, historical, sociological, and scientific subjects. The “teachers” included such personalities of the late 1800s as Booker T. Washington and Carrie Nation.

The Chautauqua idea was soon copied in other communities for people who could not travel to Lake Chautauqua, New York. The first was in Ohio with similar programs soon to follow in Michigan and Iowa. By 1900 there were two hundred pavilions

in thirty-one states. Each furnished vacation blended with study and entertainment. On the program were teachers, preachers, explorers, travelers, scientists, politicians and statesmen, singers, violinists, pianists and bell ringers, glee clubs, bands, orchestras, concert companies, quartette’s, quintet’s and sextet’s, monologists, readers, elocutionists, jugglers, magicians, whistlers and yodelers.

Two of the most popular lecturers were Russell Conwell and William Jennings Bryan. Conwell’s lecture “Acres of Diamonds” was delivered six thousand times. The theme was “get rich young man, for money is power and power ought to be in the hands of good people. I say you have no right to be poor.” It was an excellent example of “Mother, Home, and Heaven” – lectures designed to include platitudes about the desirability of truth and virtue, given in an earnest style, with a touch of sentiment. William Jennings Bryan’s “Prince of Peace” lecture was a favorite and for thirty

years his honey-sweet voice packed pavilions with rapt audiences. The most famous political speech was Bryan’s Cross of Gold speech given at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago July 9, 1896.

Circus tents were used in communities that did not have permanent Chautauqua pavilions. Soon speakers and entertainers were on the Chautauqua circuit moving from town to town.

The movement ended soon after the Golden Jubilee, held at Lake Chautauqua in 1924. Improved communication and transportation in rural areas made radio and movies readily available plus the commercialization that had crept in and weakened the program led to the movement’s demise. In 1931, George Dalgety suggested that Chautauqua had ended “because it arose out of a passing need. It gave the people in good measure what they wanted and brightened millions of otherwise drab lives.”

Neighborhood Scavenger Hunt winners announced

If you happened to look out your window and spied folks looking around at your house, you may have witnessed someone who was out on the Belle Grove Square Scavenger Hunt. I am sure that some folks now recognize and appreciate even more some of

the architectural treasures found in our neighborhood. After looking over the entries, I am pleased to announce our two winners: Darthean Fox and Carol Townshend. Each of them will be receiving a year’s subscription to “This Old House.”



August was a busy month for Belle Grove Square park: pictured from left to right are Carroll County String Project’s recital, a church service in t

Service in the Park

The annual Service in the Park is scheduled for Sunday, September 6, at 9:30 AM, in Belle Grove Park. The Westminster Church of the Brethren along with members of St. Paul's United Church of Christ, will be conducting the service. The preachers for the service will be Pastor Marty and Pastor Lucy from St Paul's.

Folks are encouraged to bring lawn chairs and enjoy the service. If it does rain, the event will be held in St. Paul's sanctuary. St. Paul's will provide child care for both churches.

Folks are encouraged to stay after the service to join in fellowship and refreshments.

Civil War in September

According to Frederic Shriver Klein in *Two Hundred Years Ago, Memories of Westminster 1764-1964*, the years of the Civil War brought special problems to border states like Maryland, where loyalties were strongly divided between North and South. In Westminster, young men volunteered for service under both flags during the conflict. Before the war ended, the town was occupied three times in three successive years by soldiers of

both the Union and Confederate armies, and during the Gettysburg campaign in 1863, it was the main supply base for the great Army of the Potomac as it moved north into Pennsylvania.

The first contact with Civil War soldiers came on September 11, 1862, when the Confederate army was moving north before the battle of Antietam, and when a scouting party of Virginia cavalry, led by Col. Thomas L. Rosser, suddenly arrived in Westminster in the early evening. They were a welcome sight for Southern Sympathizers, who opened their homes to entertain the unexpected visitors, while Union sympathizers stayed out of sight. No serious damage was done, although some records were seized and destroyed, and the next morning the troops rode away.

A newspaper account of the event explained the first encounter with troops in the following way. "The townspeople were awake early this morning. Most of the rebels were compelled to stay with the body of the regiment, but many of the officers went to the taverns and private houses to get a warm breakfast. During all this morning, officers and privates have been riding up and down. In some instances, I saw secession ladies, when a fine looking young officer was passing, come out to the door, hail him and present him with a

bouquet of flowers. So there was quite a number of young fellows dashing along with bunches of flowers in their hands. Some carried small rebel flags, nine or ten inches long.

This morning the cavalry was apparently preparing leave the town. The brass piece of light horse artillery was placed in the middle of the street as it rises to the hill where the roads fork-the turnpike to Uniontown and the plank road to Taneytown. Before their departure-guided by Oscar Dorsey, a former resident of this vicinity, but for some time past a member of this regiment of cavalry-then destroyed the framed muster roll of the Carroll Guard, which was hanging on the wall of the armory, broke all the lamps, carried off a drum and a United States flag which had been put up on front of the hall. Westminster is the county seat of Carroll County and all the enrollment books for the anticipated draft were deposited here. These books they got hold of and some they destroyed in the street to the great amusement and delight of a crowd of sympathizers, while the remainder they carried off. The secession sympathizers were overjoyed at this proceeding because, they said, now that the records were destroyed, they could not be drafted into Lincoln's army. They also captured about a dozen Union Zouaves who were guarding

a point adjacent to this place.

An hour afterwards they were on the way. Accompanied by the piece of flying artillery, the regiment left amid the cheers of the rebels, and followed by a number of recruits on horseback. They took the turnpike to Uniontown..."

Published in the New York Herald, September 15, 1862

Pennsylvania Avenue Streetscape Project

As reported by Bryan Schutt in the Carroll County Times, the Pennsylvania Avenue streetscape project is going to receive roughly \$315,000 to be used to improve the neighborhood.

Westminster's Common Council awarded a roughly \$315,000 project bid to Justice Excavating Inc. based in Aspers, Pa., to move forward with construction.

Renovating the intersections of Pennsylvania Avenue and Union Street and Pennsylvania Avenue and West Main Street to improve safety are two main focuses of the streetscape project.

Those changes along with curb bump-outs are aimed to help slow traffic and aid pedestrians walking Pennsylvania Avenue.



the square on August 16, and the Westminster Municipal Band's return, followed by the very well attended concert in the park August 23, 2009.

Neighborhood Spotlight

Built around 1885, the house located at 36 Bond is significant both in a strictly architectural sense and in its relationship to Belle Grove Square and the buildings that surround that piece of greenery (early community-planning).

According to Christopher Weeks in *The Building of Westminster* in Maryland, the house itself is an amalgamation of several distinct periods and today is reminiscent of a turn of this century beach house, such as one might find in Cape May. This feeling is enhanced by the heavy cloth awnings that shelter the windows on the north and east, the house's more exposed sides.

From the strictly architectural

standpoint, the house is interesting as a superb example of plasticity: the builder of the house took great liberties, creating voids where there ought to be solids and solids where there ought to be voids. This is especially evident on the ground floor to the north where a recessed porch breaks the continuity of the facade wall, supplying a void beneath the large tower and gable that rise above it to create a busy, but not hectic, roof line. The interest of this apparent instability is heightened by the realization that the dimensions of the tower coincide closely with those of the void beneath. There is a whimsical inclination to suppose that a piece of the main floor has been hewn out and placed upon the roof.



Clock Tower Restored

As noted in an article published in the Carroll County times, work is about finished on restoring the Westminster clock tower.



Sprucin' up: Church of the Brethren gets a new front sidewalk along Park Place and Bond on Belle Grove Square, August 2009.



David Booth, a Westminster resident and member of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors Inc., said he expects final repairs to be completed by mid-September.

According to Common Councilwoman Suzanne Albert, all repairs are being made to keep the clock as historically accurate as possible. The Westminster Historic District Commission has approved all changes, she said.

Four new pairs of clock hands were sent to Westminster and were slated to be placed on all four clock faces around the end of August, Booth said. The new hands are being made in New York according to historic clock tower drawings by Chuck Roesser, president of the Tower Clock Chapter of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors Inc.

The new hands will be aluminum rather than wood, and the same color as the current hands. Booth said they should last several hundred years.

Booth will start internal clock repairs once the new hands are placed, but repairs will leave the clock down for about two weeks.

"I'm going to completely disassemble the clock, take the gears off the

axels, polish the pivot ends, replace what needs replaced, reassemble it and oil it," Booth said.

Total repairs to the clock tower are estimated to cost about \$30,000, and funding for the project is coming from community donations.

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

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