



# HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD

VOLUME 2 ~ ISSUE 12 ~ 2009 DECEMBER



## Happy Holidays!

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**Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Meeting**

**Thursday  
Jan. 21, 2009  
at 7:00pm**

**St. Paul's Church,  
Bond & Green**

**Join us, meet your great Belle Grove Square neighbors and enjoy the holidays!**

As most of you know, our neighborhood was founded during the Victorian era. Many of the things we love most at Christmas also started in the Victorian age, such as sending cards, and the invention of the Christmas cracker. The picture of a fat, jolly Father Christmas or Santa Claus dates from Victorian times. The Christmas tree became popular, as did gift shopping in big stores. It was in 1841 that Prince Albert and Queen Victoria first displayed a Christmas tree in the palace. Prince Albert had brought the tradition with him from Germany as he was well acquainted with displaying Christmas trees and decorating at Christmas time from his youth in Germany. It was then that the tradition of decorating the house and pine trees had spread throughout the English country and a few years later to America.

Large stockings were hung on the mantel for each member of the family. Inside could be found small gifts, candies, fruits, and nuts. The exchanging of more elaborate gifts

did not start until the late 1800's where gift giving and charity became the focus of the Christmas tradition. In 1880 stores began to sell ornaments for the Christmas tree and catered to the public for its Christmas needs. It was then that Christmas took off as one of the most widely celebrated holidays.

Santa Claus was accepted as a jolly charitable figure that

rewarded good children with presents and punished the bad. The personification of Santa Claus was really a combination of two figures. One: a Lycian who became bishop of Myra and suffered persecution and was imprisoned during 300 A.D. He had been known for his charitable deeds and giving to others. He was named Saint Nicholas.

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Holiday greeting cards have been sent since Victorian times to friends, family, and loved ones both near and far away.



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Then two: The old Nordic myths of a magical man who rewarded good children with gifts and punishment to the bad. These two soon became what the Victorians saw as Santa Clause and the fable we know of today.

In Colonial America there were no Christmas celebrations. As recently as 100 years or so ago, such observances were declared illegal in many parts of the United States, including most of New England, being defined as pagan and a reproach to faith. (Today, it is against the law in some areas to display any Christmas symbols that are not pagan in nature... the erecting of nativity scenes, for example, are banned in some regions of America. Ironically, New England being one such area).

In Puritan Massachusetts, anyone caught observing the holiday was obliged to pay a fine. Connecticut also enacted a law forbidding the celebration of Christmas... and the baking of mincemeat pies. A few of the earliest settlers, however, did celebrate Christmas, but it was far from a common holiday during the Colonial era.

Prior to the American Civil War, the North and South were divided on the issue of Christmas as much

as they were on the question of slavery. Many Northerners considered it sinful to celebrate Christmas since Thanksgiving was a much more appropriate holiday. In the South, however, Christmas played an important role in the social season. Perhaps not surprisingly, the first three American states to declare Christmas a legal holiday were

located in the South: Alabama in 1836; and Louisiana and Arkansas, both in 1838.

In the years following the Civil War, Christmas traditions began to filter across the country. Children's books played a vital role in spreading the customs of Christmas celebrations, particularly the tradition of

trimmed trees and gifts delivered by Santa Claus. Sunday School classes encouraged participation in such celebrations. The emergence of women's magazines also played an important part in promoting the festival of Christmas, by suggesting various ways to decorate for the holidays, as well as supplying instructions on how to make such decorations.

## Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" is perhaps the most modern of all Christmas symbols and certainly the most familiar of Reindeer, even though he was not a member of Santa's original team. Created in 1939 by a 34-year old copywriter named Robert L. May, Rudolph was the product of a request made by May's employer, Montgomery Ward, which wanted a Christmas story it could use as a promotional tool for its chain of department stores.

In search of an alliterative name for his misfit, May considered and rejected "Rollo" as being too cheerful and carefree. He also rejected "Reginald," feeling it to be too British in nature, before finally deciding upon "Rudolph."

The story was written as a series

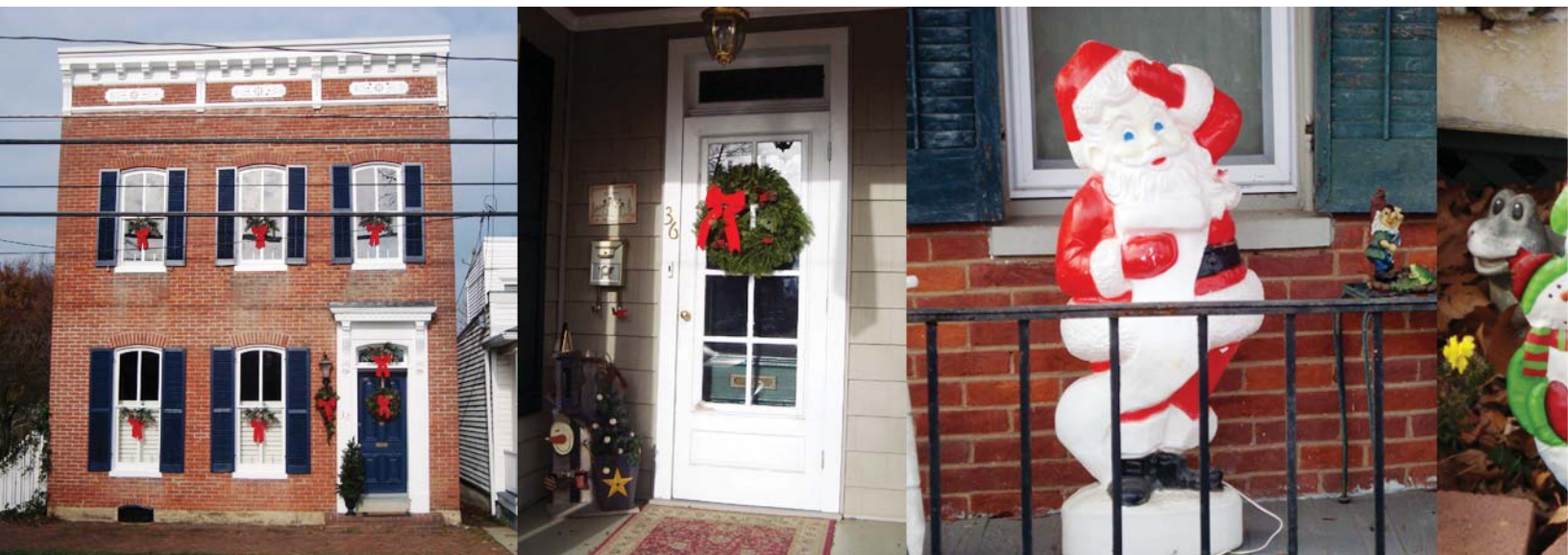


The original stop-motion puppets used in the 1964 Rankin/Bass holiday special have now been fully restored.

of rhyming couplets which May tested on his 4-year old daughter Barbara as he went along. Barbara was delighted with the story, but May's employer feared that a tale featuring a red nose... an image

usually associated with drinking and drunkards... might prove unsuitable for a Christmas story. May responded by taking Denver Gillen, a friend from Montgomery Ward's art department, to the Lincoln Park Zoo in order that Gillen could sketch some deer. Gillen's illustrations of a red-nosed reindeer overcame the hesitancy of May's employer and the Rudolph story was approved. That first year (1939), Montgomery Ward distributed 2.4 million copies of May's booklet, and although the wartime paper shortage curtailed printing for the following several years, a grand total of 6 million copies had been given to children by the end of 1946.

In 1947 "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" was printed commercially and, in 1948,



All around, signs of the holidays can be seen as residents prepare to spend holiday time with family and friends. The City of Westminster deco



was shown in theaters as a 9-minute cartoon. The Rudolph phenomenon really caught on, however, when Johnny Marks, May's brother-in-law and songwriter, penned the lyrics and melody for a Rudolph song. This musical version of Rudolph's tale was recorded by Gene Autry in 1949. It sold two million copies during its first year and went on to become one of the best-selling songs of all time... second only to "White Christmas." In 1964, an American television special about Rudolph, narrated by Burl Ives, was produced and remains a constant holiday favorite to this day.



About 50 floats gleaming with electric lights headed down Main Street in Westminster's parade. This was the first year of the official Miracle on Main Street Holiday Electric Parade. (Photo: Carroll County Times, November 29, 2009)

# Neighborhood to host 2010 home tour

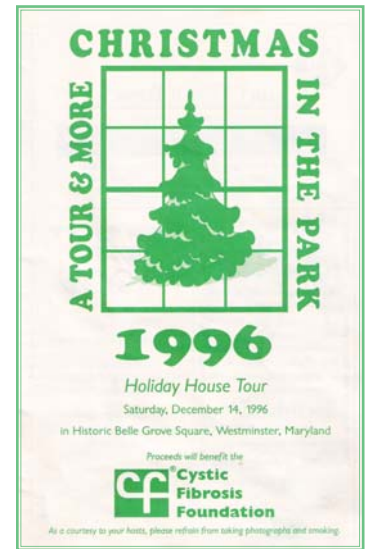
by Mitchell Edmondson

If all goes as planned, at this time next year our neighborhood will be finished preparing to host Westminster's December 2010 Holiday Home Tour. At our last board meeting a number of neighborhood residents expressed an interest in including their homes in the tour. During our next meeting Thursday, January 21, city officials will be looking for folks to sign up as a definite participant in

the tour. The city needs to receive firmed up commitments from interested residents in order to start working on advertising and printed materials for the tour. The meeting will be held at St. Paul's church at the corner of Bond and Green Streets, January 21, 2010 at 7:00pm.

Annual elections will also be held January 21 for the Historic Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Association for 2010 - if you have any nominations for officers or the board please email newsletter@bellegrovesquare.org or call us at (443) 293-7203 by Dec. 31.

The home tour organizers would like to have around ten homes for the tour if possible. St Paul's is already on board and Bruce and I plan on signing up our home for the tour as well. We will also be willing to help other home owners prepare for the tour if there's anything we can do. If you need help in planning for the tour or have questions, please call Tim Rogers with the city at (410) 848-4628 or contact Bruce DeVault with the neighborhood group at (443) 293-7203.



The last holiday tour held in Belle Grove Square was December 14, 1996, and featured six area homes and two churches on the square.

The home tour is a fantastic chance to show off our special and historic neighborhood. It is also an important fundraiser for local organizations including the Westminster Historic District Commission and the Historical Society of Carroll County. Please plan on coming to our January 21st neighborhood meeting or call Tim Rogers to add your home to the list for the 2010 tour.



decorated Belle Grove Square Park with a tree, holly and lights for the season, and everyone's chipping in to help the neighborhood look great.





## Woman's Club 2009 Ornaments For Sale

Woman's Club of Westminster, a local charitable organization many of you in the neighborhood may know best as the group that does the wonderful flower garden every year in Belle Grove Square Park along Green Street, has chosen "The Old Stone Building" - now O'Lordan's Irish Pub and a neighborhood fixture - for its 2009 holiday ornament to raise money for the group's activities.

The building first appeared on maps just after the civil war as a foundry, and has served many owners over the years. It's one of the oldest buildings - and one of the few remaining stone structures - in the city of Westminster.

Woman's Club creates new holiday ornaments each year depicting local landmarks that feature aspects of area history. The local chapter is affiliated with the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

2009 holiday ornaments are being sold at O'Lordan's, at the Historical Society, Carroll County Arts Council, Westminster Antique Mall,

and at numerous other locations around town.

Sandy Ferguson, who can be reached at 410-848-3032, is also available to take orders for the current or past year ornaments.

## Historic District Commission Update

As reported in the Carroll County Times, The Westminster Historic District Commission recently appointed Kevin Wagman to the group.

Kevin Wagman, who previously served on the Carroll County Historic Preservation Commission, said he's a 22-year resident of Westminster and was excited to get started. His term lasts for three years.

Wagman's house on Green Street is considered one of the historic homes in the area, and he recently completed one renovation project using rehabilitation tax credit money from the city.

The Common Council also reappointed Kristen McMasters to the Westminster HDC. She has served two terms for the commission and currently serves as the chairwoman.



Sandy Ferguson and Norma Jean Swam with Woman's Club of Westminster show the group's 2009 holiday ornaments for sale.

## Holiday Events Calendar

- Carroll County Farm Museum Holiday Tour: noon to 5 p.m. Dec. 5, 6, 12 and 13, Carroll County Farm Museum, 500 S. Center St., Westminster. \$2.50 for general admission, free for ages 6 and younger.

Main St., Westminster. \$8.

- Common Ground on the Hill presents the Walt Michael & Company Holiday Concert: 8 p.m. Dec. 19, Carroll Arts Center, 91 W. Main St., Westminster. \$17-\$19.

- Maryland Ensemble Theatre presents "A Christmas Carol": 8 p.m. Dec. 11, 3 and 8 p.m. Dec. 12, Carroll Arts Center, 91 W. Main St., Westminster, \$12-\$15.

- Second Sundays at Don's Place Community Coffee House: 7 p.m. Dec. 13, St. Paul's UCC, Bond & Green Sts., Westminster. Featuring the music of Port Righ (Wayne & Jo Morrison) - A Celtic Christmas.

- The Carroll County Dance Center presents "The Nutcracker Suite": 7 p.m. Dec. 17-18, Scott Center, Carroll Community College, 1601 Washington Road, Westminster, \$15.

- Art of Motion presents "The Nutcracker": 12:30 p.m. and 4 p.m. Dec. 19, Carroll Arts Center, 91 W.

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Santa Claus is greeted by Westminister Mayor Mathias and community leaders at Santa's house on Locust Lane in downtown Westminster in this photo from the late 1950s or early 1960s.