



# HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD

VOLUME 3 ~ ISSUE 2 ~ FEBRUARY 2010



## Happy Birthday, George!

Inside:

Spring Around the Corner?

Neighborhood News

Westminster Banking Arrives Early

Traders Arrive to Find Lush, Green Valley

The Blizzard of 1924

**Next Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Meeting:**

**Thursday  
April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009  
at 7:00pm**

**St. Paul's UCC,  
Bond & Green Sts.**

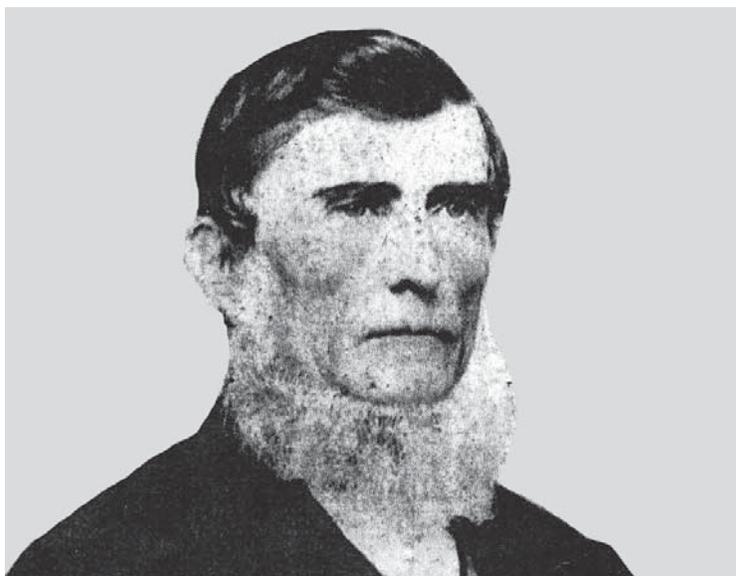
**Join us and meet your great Belle Grove Square neighbors!**

*by Mitchell Edmondson*

As most of you know, Belle Grove Square was established by George W. Matthews in 1866. He purchased the land that became our neighborhood for \$3000.00. While trying to find out more about the man, I have learned that

Matthews was born February 7, 1814 and died August 23, 1903. His obituary reports that he was born on the farm of his father, William in Baltimore County, who was of English ancestry. His father was a light cavalryman in the war of 1812 and Matthews' grandfather was a soldier in the Revolutionary

War. Matthews came to Carroll County and engaged in farming as the owner of an estate on the Patapsco. He sold his land and moved to Westminster in 1864 to become a member of the firm of Wagoner and Mathews in which he conducted an extensive foundry for a number of years. After he retired he became a Justice of the Peace. He called the land which he donated Belle Grove Park in honor of his daughter, Miss Belle Matthews. He also donated to the Baptist Church of which he was a member a large lot fronting on the park which is now the Church of the Brethren. His grandson George E. Matthews later became mayor of Westminster. Apparently Mr. Matthews not only developed our neighborhood, he also sold houses in other parts of Westminster. Below is an ad placed in the January 17, 1880 edition of the Democratic Advocate:



George W. Matthews donated land to the city of Westminster for public recreation that is now Belle Grove Square Park.



## Wasn't Spring Just Around the Corner?

by Mitchell Edmondson

Speaking as someone who used to live in Florida... I have to say the past few weeks of winter have almost been too much to bear. Even browsing through garden catalogs no longer helps me believe that spring is just around the corner. Hearing that the groundhog saw his shadow was the almost the final straw. Maybe if I enjoyed skiing or building snowman I could learn to love snow. Since that is not going to happen I must bundle up and try to focus on the fact that in just a few short weeks the cherry and dogwood trees will be in full bloom. The park will green up and children will once again be playing around the fountain that is currently completely buried under the record snowfall we've received.

One of the things I have been doing to take my mind of the snow is learning more about the man who founded our neighborhood. In this month's newsletter the cover article tells more about our neighborhood founder George W. Matthews.

## Neighborhood News

The coming spring and summer will once again bring great things to our neighborhood. At our last board meeting we have decided to try to organize a neighborhood garage sale sometime in April. Now is the time to start gathering up all those things you no longer use and get them ready for a sale. At the meeting we also decided to hold our neighborhood picnic on August 3, 2010 to coincide with National Night out, and we'll start preparations for this at the next Neighborhood meeting in April.

We submitted our historic neighborhood sign proposal to the city and they have approved the proposal. We have gotten one

estimate for the cost for the project so far. It looks like we will need to raise around \$1500.00 to complete the neighborhood sign project.

It also looks like Historic Belle Grove Square Neighborhood will host the December 2010 Home Tour as a number of residents have expressed interest and generously volunteered their homes to be on the tour. We still need a few more houses for the tour. If you are interested please contact Bruce DeVault with the neighborhood group at 443-293-7203 or Tim Rogers at the City of Westminster, 410-848-4628. If you are unable to add your home to the list please consider volunteering in other ways to help with the tour. We will



Historic Belle Grove Square Neighborhood Association's logo, which was chosen by a neighborhood survey, is being adapted for use with new neighborhood street signs which the city can install on top of existing signs within the neighborhood's boundaries.

have a great need for volunteers to help out with the tour, and will

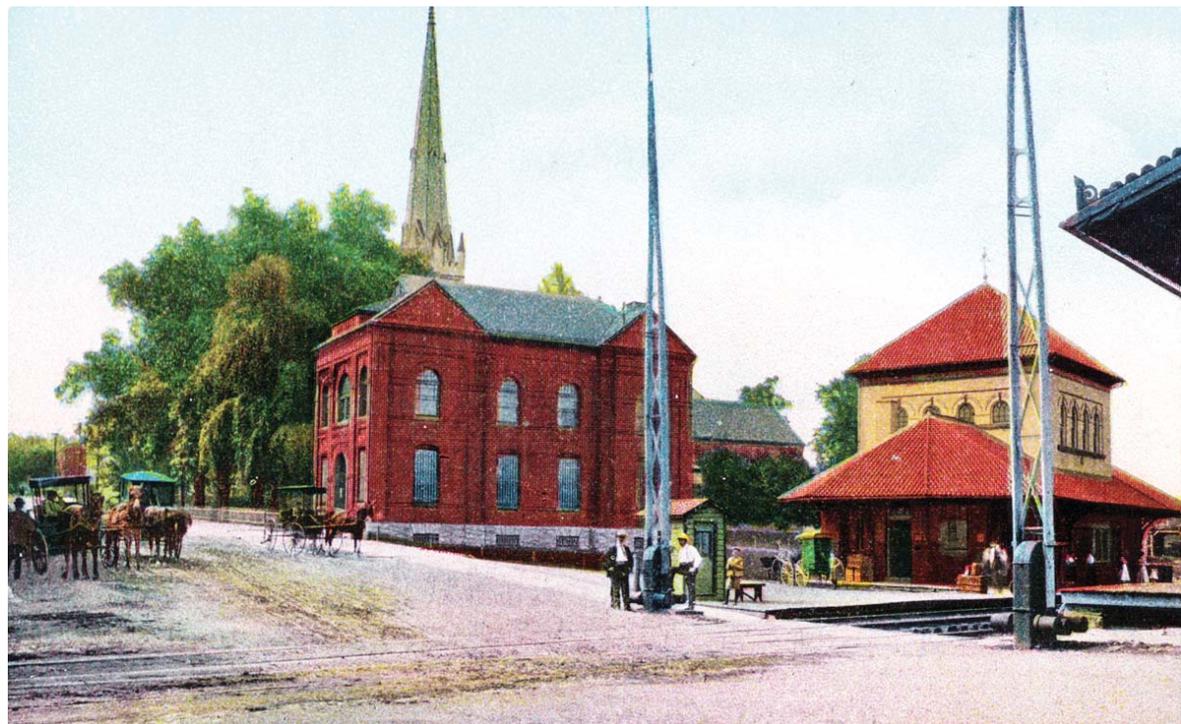
have more information as the date approaches.

## Westminster Banking Arrives Early

As a trading center and stopping point for grain farmers traveling between Pennsylvania and Baltimore, Westminster thrived. When the bankers fled Baltimore during the War of 1812, several of them temporarily fled to our city.

During the threatened capture of Baltimore by the British in 1814, the funds of the Commercial and Farmers Bank of Baltimore were moved to Westminster. When it was safe to return to Baltimore, one banker remained behind

and this afterwards gave rise to an office of Pay and Receipt, presided over by Mr. Thomas. An act of incorporation was obtained from the Legislature and the Bank of Westminster was chartered in 1816. The Bank



Western Maryland Railroad Station and First National Bank (established 1860) are depicted downtown in this postcard from the early 1900s. WMRR was a lifeline connecting Baltimore with all points west.



George Albaugh demonstrated his faith in his city by building the splendid Charles Carroll Hotel (also known as the Westminster Hotel) in 1898. The hotel is shown here as it appears after James Grieves' renovation and conversion to offices.

of Westminster is today known as Union National Bank. "To induce thirsty farmers to cash their checks at the Westminster Bank (now Union National Bank), the bank kept a barrel of locally distilled Maryland Rye on tap in the board room and offered its customers complimentary drinks" wrote Christopher Weeks in "The Buildings of Westminster in

Maryland."

Westminster Deposit and Trust Company was organized in 1898. On July 1, 1898 the bank was operated in a temporary headquarters located on Court Street. The bank later moved to the Charles Carroll Hotel building where it remained until 1952.

## Traders Arrive to Find Lush, Green Valley

In the early 1700's an occasional white man would skirt Parr's Ridge as he traveled from the southeast to the camps of Indians in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Traders talked of the lush valley between the big ridge and the Monocacy River and of the rolling hills that fell away from the ridge to the East.

And the farmers heard and they came. They found water and built near it and grew grains.

And the millers heard, and they came. A trader, tired of the trek to the banks of the Monocacy, stopped at a mill. He sold goods to the visiting farmers and stayed.

Others heard and came. The

country was rich, and a man might prosper as much as he worked or fail if he was lazy. Men followed the choice then as they follow now. The land was a choice. A new beginning.

A rugged man – an Indian fighter – named John White, owned a tract of land on the East side of the big ridge, near the headwaters of many streams. He was granted the land by the King of England in 1733.

One of those who came to the place called White's Level was a dark haired man called Winchester. He divided 16 ½ acres that he bought from White into 45 lots, and sold them to the new families that slowly came to build homes and businesses.

The town grew like a sapling blown by constant easterly winds, toward the northeast. A branch sprouted toward the north toward Pennsylvania and was given the name Pennsylvania Avenue.

The farm was life itself in the 1800's, and those who catered to the farmer were both popular and rich. The farmer was generally a conservative man, and the

townsmen who served him had to be conservative or they were not trusted. The family names that have survived the years had grandfathers who were willing to draw the mark and fathers who were smart enough to walk it.

The prosperity of the mid-1800's shows today in the fine homes that are shaded by old trees along Pennsylvania Avenue, Main Street, and Willis Street.

The community that became the seat of the New Carroll County in 1837 has always been a good place to live, close to the sea and close to the mountains. The virtues of metropolitan areas such as Baltimore and Washington have been easily accessible, while the disadvantages of the crawling city have remained foreign.

It is a college town. Western Maryland established itself on the hill right after the Civil War, the most excitement the town ever knew.

*Editor's Note: as reported in the Hanover Evening Sun October 15, 1964.*



Workers prepare to install new windows at a neighborhood home.

# The Blizzard of 1924

by Jay A. Graybeal

Although the last two Carroll winters have produced only a modest amount of snow, the historical record reveals that blizzards frequently visited the region, occasionally at this time of year. The March 14, 1924 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper reported on such a storm:

*"BLIZZARD STRIKES CARROLL. ROADS BLOCKED BY DRIFTS--NO MAIL DELIVERY--TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH WIRES BROKEN DOWN--TRAINS DELAYED BY WRECKED FREIGHT TRAIN THAT WAS DERAILED BY DRIFT."*

The worst Spring blizzard since March 4, 1909, visited Maryland Tuesday and isolated our city and county from the outside world until Wednesday. The snow started to fall Monday evening about 7:30 o'clock and was accompanied by high wind that piled the snow in huge drifts, blocking roads, interrupting railroad traffic and demoralizing telegraph and telephone service. In Baltimore two persons were killed. One by suffocating under a collapsed chicken house roof and another fatally injured by a street car from the blinding snow. It is estimated by the C. & P. Telephone Company that 15,000 telephones in the state were out of commission, 5,000 poles down and that the total damage would represent a loss of about \$500,000. It will require 10 days to restore service again. Some of the effects from the snow storm were: The Westminster and Reisterstown Bus and the Union Bridge Bus abandoned all of its schedules on Tuesday, as the roads were drifted to an impassable state. On Wednesday morning the running of the busses were resumed on schedule time. The Gwynn Oak Bus did not attempt to fill its schedule until yesterday morning,

as the Washington road was not opened until Wednesday afternoon. The State Roads Commission snow plows were sent out at midnight Monday to open the State roads. One succeeded in reaching Bridgeport by the way of Taneytown going up, but experienced difficulty on the return. The one that started down to Reisterstown made it as far as Sandyville where it found trouble in bucking the drifts and turned and came back to this city. On the Manchester road Thomas, Bennett & Hunter rigged up a truck with a plow in front and sent it out. The road was drifted badly and at Brummel the driver of the machine was blinded by the heavy fall of snow and went up a bank and stuck. After releasing the machine it was brought back to this city. In the evening the plows were again sent out and cleaned the snow from the roads with some little difficulty, except where drifts were too large to buck a gang of men were used to shovel a path wide enough to allow traffic to proceed. The county roads were drifted shut and were shoveled open by men. The mail carriers on the rural mail routes made an attempt to dispatch, but only one succeeded, and that was on Route 12, but he was ten hours longer than usual. The rest only serving a part of their patrons and then only returning after a hard try to move through the deep snow. A number of automobilists were caught out in the snow Monday night and abandoned their cars and walked to their destination after they became wedged in a snow bank. The next day they returned and dug their cars out. Some of the cars were covered completely over. The loss of the C. & P. Telephone Company will be very heavy as hundreds of telephone poles and numerous wires leveled to the ground which will require some time to repair. Gangs of men are busily engaged in restoring the service throughout the county and in this city. Westminster was cut off from the rural districts for a few days



This rare image from the early 1870s shows Main Street on a winter day. The photographer was standing on East Main Street, approximately in front of St. John's Church. The large brick building in the left foreground stands on the site that would later be occupied by the First National Bank. George W. Albaugh's One Price Store is at the center left, just beyond the railroad tracks. On the right side of the street, neither the Albion Hotel nor the Babylon Building have been constructed yet. West Main Street disappears in the distance, rising up College Hill. Snow covers the sidewalks and sides of the street, but traffic has churned the center of the street into a slushy mess, making driving and walking difficult. From the HSCC book Images of Carroll County.

and no word of the extent of damage could be estimated. Large tree limbs were smashed off by the heavy weight of the snow clinging to them. The W. M. Railroad trains run late for three days on account of the telegraphic interruption. Poles and wires were down at various places from Hagerstown to Baltimore, which disarranged the block system at different points along the line. Operators, Frank Butler and Harry Ryland, at this station directed the running of the trains between this city and Emory Grove and Union Bridge. A freight train was wrecked in a snow bank on the Western Maryland Railway, west of Glyndon, Tuesday morning. Passenger and mail trains were delayed several hours. Our city was a sea of slush and water for two days but the snow is disappearing rapidly. Our public schools were closed all day Tuesday and some of the rural ones were not opened until yesterday."

Snow removal in 1924 was somewhat easier than it had been for the 1909 storm. Motorized equipment replaced horse drawn

vehicles of that earlier era; however, much of the snow was still removed by large crews of workmen with shovels.

*Editor's note: this article reprinted from Carroll County Times, 14 March 1999.*

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  
submitted may be edited  
for space or clarity.

Entire contents  
copyright © 2009  
All rights reserved.