



# HISTORIC BELLE GROVE SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD

VOLUME 4 ~ ISSUE 3 ~ MARCH 2011



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**St Patrick's Day  
Neighborhood  
Progressive Dinner**

**Friday, March 18<sup>th</sup>  
6:30 - 9:30 pm**

**RSVP REQUIRED  
443-293-7203  
SPACE IS LIMITED!**

*Join us and meet your  
great Belle Grove  
Square neighbors for  
an evening of fun!*

## Historic Districts Build Community

*by Mitchell Edmondson*

Because our annual surveys have always shown historic preservation to be the number one concern in Belle Grove Square, we will be focusing on historic preservation and historic neighborhoods in some of our upcoming newsletters this year.

Currently, there are more than 13,600 designated historic districts listed with the National Register of Historic Places. So just what makes a property qualify as historic?

Historic districts are locally designated neighborhoods deemed worthy of historical preservation. Living in a historic district means certain restrictions to renovations and remodeling may apply to your home - these restrictions are designed to help individual structures and the neighborhood as whole retain its historic architecture and charm.

However, historic districts bring

economic value to a city that goes beyond higher home prices - historic landmarks can be tourist destinations, bringing outside dollars into a community. They also can attract stable businesses and promote a sense of community, according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Higher home values, tourism, and stable business communities bring more tax dollars into a community as well, allowing for greater public investment in infrastructure and services.

A 2005 study by the Brookings Institute that looked at property values in historic districts in the East Coast found that: "Historic preservation has important economic values and produces certain economic benefits for both private actors and the public at large. Preservation projects can be profitable; and preservation policies do make sound fiscal sense. However, the economic impacts and measures of historic preservation activities are too situational to be able to extrapolate

widely."

The benefits of living in a historic district go beyond economics. Though recent years have proved that historic landmark house prices may rise and fall, living in a historic house connects you to something far more solid - a community rooted in the past.

The first historic district was located in Charleston, South Carolina and predated the first U.S. federal government designated district by more than thirty years. Other local historic districts popped up and in 1966 the U.S. government created the National Register of Historic Places on the heels of a report from the U.S. Conference of Mayors which stated Americans suffered from "rootlessness." [1] By the 1980s there were thousands of federally designated historic districts.

The Uniontown Historic District is the only Carroll county neighborhood designated as a historic district, added in 1986.

# Neighborhood News



In just a few weeks our neighborhood will be celebrating the arrival of spring with our very first progressive dinner. On March 18, 2011, the dinner will start with appetizers at 1 Park Avenue, then to 32 Bond for the evening's main course, then finally to 9 Park Avenue for dessert. We have limited attendance to 24 and at last count we had 21 folks signed up. RSVP required, 443-293-7203.

## Street Paving Update

The coming of spring may not only be bringing cherry blossoms to our neighborhood, it may also bring the asphalt trucks. According to city officials, road resurfacing will begin April 1. Bond Street is currently scheduled to be included. Unforeseen conditions and factors uncovered in the resurfacing may limit the number of streets to be done, but hopefully there will be enough funds to get Bond Street repaved. Bond Street is one of the most traveled streets in the area and its appearance impacts our

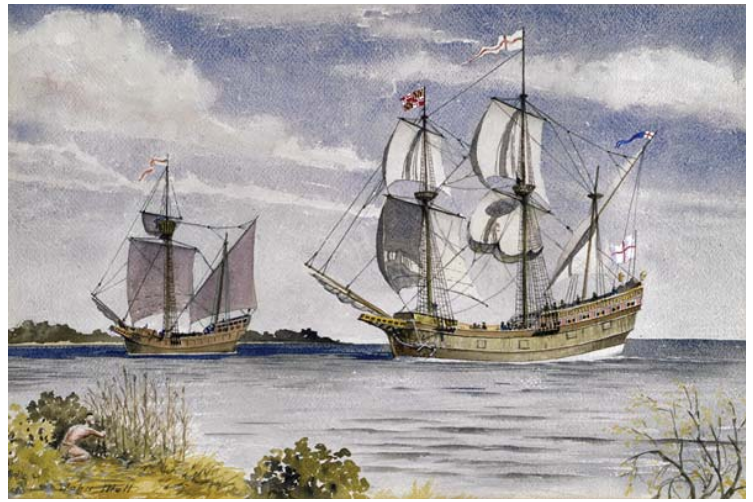
neighborhood. Residents will be notified prior to the resurfacing.

## May Front Porch Sale

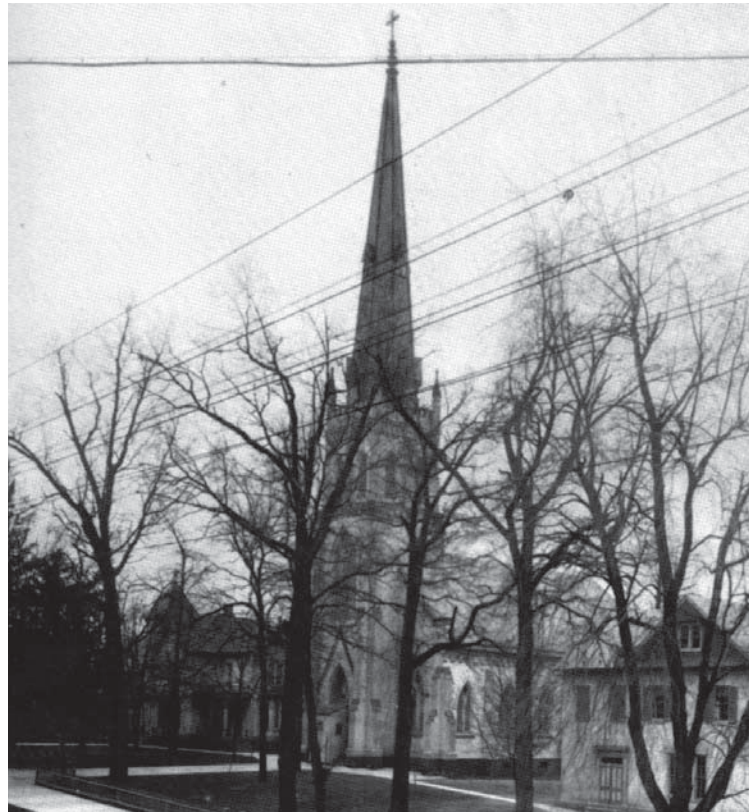
If you are like me, you have things lying around the house (basement or attic too) that are no longer needed. Sometime during the month of May we are going to have our second annual front porch sale and you will have a chance to get rid of those no longer wanted items. Neighbors will place an ad in the paper, and we will have signs around the major intersections to let others know of the sale. So, start sorting through your treasures and get them ready for the sale!

## Park Gardening News

As most of you know, all the flower beds in the park are maintained by volunteers. Neighborhood residents take care of the two beds along Park Place and the Woman's Club of Westminster is in charge of the bed along W. Green, but last year, the flower bed suffered somewhat. A member of the Woman's Club reported that it was getting harder to get volunteers interested in working in the beds in the park. This spring it is not yet known if the Woman's Club will continue their volunteer work in the park or if some other group will need to step up to the plate.



Maryland Day commemorates March 25, 1634. On that day, settlers disembarked from two small sailing ships - the Ark and the Dove - on to Maryland soil. At St. Clement's Island, they landed in what is now St. Mary's County, Maryland.



A year before our neighborhood was formed, on April 29, 1865, the cornerstone was laid for St. John's Catholic Church. The church was located on the present site of the Carroll County Library. The building was condemned in 1968 and was razed in 1977 to make way for the new library.



## Report any suspicious activity

Do not hesitate to contact the Westminster Police about any suspicious activity you see happen - they want to hear from you!

You can make an anonymous report by calling 410-857-TIPS (8477) or texting your tip to 847411 (tip411), or you can make an online report at [http://www.westgov.com/police/police\\_activity.html](http://www.westgov.com/police/police_activity.html).  
To report a crime currently in progress, call 911.

## Westminster Parks & Rec.

Be sure to visit the Parks & Recreation Dept. online at [www.westgov.com/recreation/rec\\_main.html](http://www.westgov.com/recreation/rec_main.html) to see their full calendar of events! You'll be amazed at how much the city has going!

# A Short History of McDaniel College

Located just a few blocks from our neighborhood is an institution that can trace its roots back to around the same time our neighborhood was being formed.

Shortly after the Civil War, Westminster teacher Fayette R. Buell began to realize his dream of founding a private college. In the same year that George M. Matthew bought the land that later became the Historic Belle Grove Neighborhood, on May 1, 1866, Fayette R. Buell purchased 8 acres on the hilltop known as “the commons.”

Financing was slow, but he received generous support from two of the community’s leaders: J.T. Ward, the Methodist minister who would become the college’s first president, and John Smith, resident of nearby Wakefield Valley and president of the then-thriving Western Maryland Railroad.

Smith, who would become the

first president of the College’s board of trustees, offered free rail passage to everyone who attended the cornerstone ceremony held on September 6, 1866. The building was completed in September of 1867, and 37 men and women were enrolled in eight areas of study.

From its beginnings, the College offered entrance to all students without regard to race, religion, color, gender, or national or ethnic origin. It became the first coeducational college south of the Mason-Dixon Line, and one of the first coeducational colleges in the nation.

The College has always been an independent liberal arts college with an autonomous board. There was a voluntary fraternal affiliation with the United Methodist Church from 1868 until 1974, but today there are no ties to any denominational body.

In 2002, the Board of Trustees changed the name of the college



This lithograph shows the Main Building in the early 1870s.

from Western Maryland College to McDaniel College. Western Maryland’s namesake railroad had long since merged with another railroad, thereby losing its name. Prospective students often mistook Western Maryland for a satellite of a public university and thought it was located in rural western Maryland.

The College has grown from the original 37 undergraduate students to 1,600 undergraduates and 1,300 graduate students. The college now can boast of more than 70 buildings and 33 residence halls/

apartment buildings. Students come from all over the country and most of the world’s continents to the close-knit community, where learning is collaborative not competitive and every student receives personal attention.

On July 1, 2002, the name officially changed to McDaniel College in honor of William Roberts McDaniel, whose 65-year association with the College as student, professor, administrator, trustee, parent, and grandparent helped shape its destiny and today personifies its mission.

## Advantages and Disadvantages of Historic Districts

### Advantages

The benefits of a local historic district generally fall into four categories:

1. Preservation of an area with a distinctive history, architecture, or cultural overtone. Without the enactment of a local district carrying some regulations with it, you’re going to have an occasional property owner lapse into bad judgment. Some owners may just be ignorant of what is appropriate, and others deliberately want to flaunt tradition in favor of their own need for convenience,

comfort, or extravagance.

Preservation can be just plain fun and interesting. Digging into the history of your area and even your individual residence may provide some stories worth repeating to your own children. Or maybe you’ll find buried treasure under a floorboard.

Often people who purchased homes in historic areas want to “do the right thing,” but they may not be sure what that is. Living in the midst of a community consciously wrestling with the same issues, problems, and goals can be very helpful.

In addition, a local historic district is a living museum of a particular era, and if some interpretation of the meaning and conventions of the era are provided, it can become an educational asset for the next generation.

2. Buying into a local historic district with some meaningful but not overly restrictive standards usually is a good investment. A study of six towns in South Carolina showed that property values increased meaningfully as a result of a historic designation. Perhaps this appreciation in value would happen in any district of somewhat uniform architecture

where design guidelines prevent the worst of the “remuddlings,” but that’s really beside the point. When a neighborhood is more than 50 years old, it’s a remarkable achievement to have relative architectural integrity and cohesiveness.

3. Individual buildings and those located within in a district listed on the National Register are eligible for federal tax credits for rehabilitation work. States often add their own tax credits, so sometimes up to 40% of your restoration or rehabilitation costs on the exterior of your building can

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be government-reimbursed.

If you intend to take advantage of tax credits, be careful as you plan your work. In particular, be aware that the federal “Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation” (36 CFR 67) might not reward or penalize the same types of alterations as your state or local historic tax credits.

So when you have more than one level of government financial incentive at stake, consult an expert or two, such as the volunteers who serve on your local historic commission.

4. When you establish a formally recognized local historic district with some meaningful guidelines, you will prevent certain architectural and design atrocities. Specifically inappropriate building alterations, such as removal of all that Victorian gingerbread that makes your neighborhood distinctive, would be prohibited. At the other end of the spectrum, making your Sears-Roebuck purchased house kit into a Georgian colonial also will be prohibited.

Fake history retrofits will be highly discouraged, and out-of-character buildings shouldn’t be added as infill. Who wants to see a 1950s California ranch among the one-and-a-half-story cottages? Sometimes a builder even wants to build two or three blocks of up-to-the-minute homes among the cottages. Even worse.

For a good resource on why a historic home might make sense for someone you’re trying to convince, see the all-around national historic preservation organization, the National Trust for Historic

Preservation.

## Disadvantages

Most local ordinances provide for an architectural or heritage design review process. Almost always a municipality that passes an ordinance setting up a local historic district will appoint a committee or board separate from the governing body or the planning commission to oversee decision-making about the historic district or districts. And usually the historic review commission will want to put some teeth into the historic district legislation, rather than simply awarding a plaque.

This is where problems sometimes start. Home and business owners will think they are being regulated too harshly. Sometimes local ordinances permit the historic review commission or any other historic preservation group to nominate properties or a district for the historic designation. Usually an individual property owner or group of property owners also may apply on their own behalf.

A local ordinance may define exterior alterations quite broadly. We all acknowledge that changing the exterior material, exterior finish, location, and dimensions and proportions of windows, doors, roofs, and porches constitute an exterior alteration. But in some locations, changing of the pavement material of a driveway, cutting down a tree, or planting a significant new landscape all may be deemed exterior alterations.

If the local historic preservation ordinance is weak in its powers, historic districts might deteriorate in their integrity despite the designation. Writing a historic preservation ordinance is best

undertaken by someone experienced in renovation of historic building types in a particular community.

Then make sure your municipal attorney, or better yet, an attorney with a specialty in historic preservation and knowledge of your state’s court interpretations, does a thorough review of the proposed ordinance. They should be looking for loopholes and especially for a poor definitions section that might allow a provision to be overturned by a higher court on the grounds of unconstitutionally vague regulation. If you use a specialist, make sure your municipal attorney is on board and not making fun of the design guidelines behind your back.

Another important point about the historic preservation legislation is that it should uphold the commission’s presumably greater understanding of historic building types and context, and make it difficult for a city council or other elected body to overturn their decisions. Otherwise almost every decision becomes subject to appeal, and therefore to political influence.

Of course, a new historic preservation commission, and new members of the commission, must receive careful orientation to their task, their legal powers, the matters over which they have no legal authority, and the seriousness of their duties. Establishing a good relationship with the city council, city staff members, and even the planning commission is very important.

The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions supports commission members with educational offerings. You’ll also find information relevant to commissions and elected officials at this National Park Service site.

If your local government is quite interested in historic preservation, you can apply to be a Certified Local Government (CLG), which brings the credibility of being associated with national standards. Ask your state historic preservation officer about this. To some extent following CLG recommendations may help protect local governments from lawsuits.

Westminster already has a Historic District Commission, but not a real local historic district. The town of Uniontown is our only protected neighborhood in Carroll County. The Uniontown Historic district comprises nearly the entirety of Uniontown and contains a remarkably cohesive and well-preserved collection of houses, commercial buildings, churches, and schools reflecting the development of this agricultural village from the turn of the 19th century through the 1930s. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

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

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## Tip: Tired of throwing out red bags?

If you don’t read the free papers, take just a moment to call the phone number inside the paper whenever you receive one and ask them to stop delivery to your address. Free papers laying around make the neighborhood look bad, and can invite crime by advertising when you may be away from home.