

### Tribute to Peale's Hunter

By Marion Carozza

The Society's ninth annual mayoral reception last fall at the historic Lovely Lane United Methodist Church drew members, guests, history honorees and their families, including that of Wilbur Harvey Hunter—who was the veritable keeper of the City's history as director of the Peale Museum for more than 30 years until his death in 1981.

Hunter's sister, Beatrice Peterson, was unable to travel from Massachusetts but her son Matthew drove from New Jersey with his wife Ellen, sons David and Brian and grandson Josh, 8, to accept the honor. Their arrival further brightened the Nov. 14 noon hour at Lovely Lane. They had spent the morning in the Inner Harbor, touring the Constellation, and Josh was hungry. Judy Arnold, president-elect of the Society, guided the family to the buffet, where they fit in easily and charmed all. Matthew was pleased to meet people who remembered his Uncle.

The program ended with a tour of the church and the Petersons turned to Fort McHenry and the end-of-day changing of the flags. As the huge flag lowered, Josh helped prevent its touching the ground. The park ranger called for a veteran to raise the replacement. Matthew responded, and Josh proudly watched his grandfather perform, a star-spangled day for the Petersons.

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### 1812 Bicentennial Focuses

By Judith Arnold

Efforts are beginning or are in some cases well underway, on the national, State, and local levels, to plan for and implement commemorations of the bicentennial of the War of 1812, including the birth of our national anthem. Fort McHenry, Baltimore, and Maryland played a central role in the events of 1812-15 and are thus a major focus of the bicentennial activities.

At the national level, the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail was designated in May, 2008. The Trail will consist of "water and overland routes totaling approximately 290 miles ... commemorating the Chesapeake Campaign of the War of 1812 (including the British invasion of Washington, District of Columbia, and its associated feints, and the Battle of Baltimore in summer 1814)." The Trail will be administered by the National Park Service, Chesapeake Bay Office, in Annapolis. Website at [www.nps.gov/stsp](http://www.nps.gov/stsp).

### Sandlotters Fielded Dreams as Gwynns Falls Burbled

By Tom Cripps

At one of Mike Franch's Baltimore History evenings last season, I heard Professor Ed Orser talk about efforts to save a place in history for Gwynns Falls. I had read his book about block-busting on Edmondson Avenue, and I'm a graduate of Gwynns Falls Junior High—"School in sylvan shades," according to its anthem.

Ed's talk wended down the Falls through northwest Baltimore toward its mouth in the harbor. As I followed the path on his map, I felt a pang of nostalgia as it flowed a half mile or so west of my old neighborhood, Goose Hill. Then it hit me. Lacking the the historians' raw ore--documents, even a photo--Orser necessarily let pass any reference to Bloomingdale Oval, the baseball diamond that not only my sandlot teams in the 1940s called home, but also my later school, Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. Bloomingdale had passed into archaeological silence.

Back in the day, we sandlotters reckoned the field the finest in the city, maybe a smoother infield than old Oriole Park on 29th Street or Bugle Field, the Negroes' counterpart where my white Wildwood team once played a prelim to an Elite Giants game. We are talking about a city park. At the southern end of Leakin Park in a deep flat-bottomed green vale that felt rural--bounded on the east by a tree-shrouded Western Maryland

rail line, on the south by the high double-arched Edmondson Avenue bridge, and to the northwest by Leakin. But we barely noticed. It was our ball diamond that we loved, whether playing for St. Edward's as pre-teens, or Wildwood and then Poly. An elderly Mr. Diehl kept the grounds and game days he laid down fresh lime foul lines and walked the infield, head down as though looking for seashells, picking up pebbles, pegging the bases and sweeping the grandstand.

Yes, grandstand. The diamond was enclosed along each baseline by bleacher seats about four deep, while behind home plate a grander stand rose a dozen rows. Under the seats, the teams had a shower room and one side was a refreshment stand. Between the stands and the Falls, burbling by as a shallow rapids, was the fans' red brick toilet, done in a green-tiled roof.

Then what happened? Nothing the city did. We did it ourselves by ceasing to play baseball--with the result that there must be a dozen Japanese pitchers in today's big show, along with more Dominicans than players from any state except California. Over these times, Bloomingdale languished--except for a new basketball court named for one the best second basemen ever, Leon "Happy" Day, who made his mark in Bugle Field. Being black, he almost surely couldn't have played at Bloomingdale even if he wished.

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# BALTIMORE GASLIGHT

Newsletter of the Baltimore City Historical Society

### Toot! A Tug Boat Salute



Photo by Rafael Alvarez  
David Franks

After Fell's Point resident and sometimes antic artist David Franks, 61, died on Jan. 14, *The Sun* offered an abundant obituary that included his having composed, and conducted, for tug whistles, "Whistling in the Dark (a non-futile exercise in futility!)" A three-minute recording of the performance four decades ago is a seven-boat orchestration of what Fell's Pointers hear when--usually about 6AM--a pair of tugs guiding a sugar-laden freighter toot themselves into position and dock it at Domino's. With Franks having departed, and the remnant Moran Tugs quitting Fell's Point, too, did he have a premonition? We asked a Baltimore writer and his tug-boater father to reminisce:

By Rafael Alvarez

My father Manuel knew David Franks long before I did. It was back around 1971 and he and Franks were on opposite sides in a changing of the guard along the southeast Baltimore waterfront that is all but complete today. Dad was a tugboat man in the engine rooms of the Baker-Whiteley Towing Co. and Franks was a dashing young poet and visionary who'd moved into a Fell Street apartment across from where the tugs docked.

I was in the 7th grade, too young to run with the freaks turning the old seamen's village into the Greenwich Village of Baltimore; convinced there was something beyond the middle-class suburb my father's labor had earned us and unaware that much of what I aspired to existed alongside the tugboats in the person of David Franks.

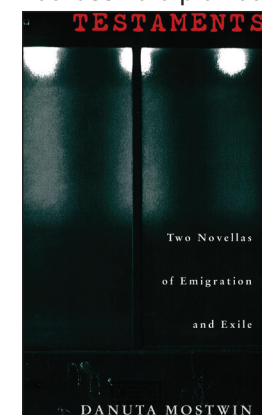
The son of a Washington physician, Franks was a boy wonder instructor at the Maryland Institute, College of Art, where he led students in assignments that sometimes caused disciplinary action and protests of censorship. Along the cobblestones of Thames Street, he suffered the taunts of the old salts and stevedores eager to conclude that the long-haired "professor" was gay, except for his pleni- (Continued on Page 2)

### Voice of Polish Emigres

By Jay Merwin

Broadway in Fell's Point and various welfare and adoption agencies of Baltimore in the 1950s all yielded up characters and situations that Danuta Pietruszewska Mostwin, a Polish émigré to Baltimore, fashioned into literature that gained a worldwide reputation and two nominations for a Nobel Prize.

Mostwin, who died in January at 88, came to Baltimore with her husband, young son and parents in 1951, moving near Patterson Park, then to other neighborhoods. As with many who left Poland after World War II, the Mostwins arrived in reduced circumstances. Danuta's husband Stanislaw had been a diplomatic courier, for the Polish government in exile, who met her after parachuting into occupied land on a secret mission.



Unable to translate his training as a lawyer to professional practice here, he worked as a pattern designer in the garment industry. Danuta, who had trained in medicine, started as a social worker with the City Welfare Department, which is where her stories often originated.

"Many of her clients were the older Polish community of Baltimore," said her son, Jacek Mostwin, a professor of urology at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. "They were people whose primary loyalty was to the [Catholic] church, and to the people overseas in the old country, who often took advantage of them." They were people like Blaise Twardowski, the protagonist of one of two Mostwin novellas translated into English. "This is a true story," he said. "All my mother's stories are about real people."

"The Last Will and Testament of Blaise Twardowski" is set in the Polish neighborhoods along Broadway, referred to as "Broad Street." Twardowski is a dying uneducated steel worker who engages a Polish store owner to read letters from relatives overseas and to send them (Continued on Page 3)

### Roundtable at MHS May 7: City's Past in a Digital Age

By Garrett Power

BCHS, Roundtable Organizer

A Roundtable of Baltimore Historians will be held on Friday, May 7, at the Maryland Historical Society, 201 W. Monument Street, from 9AM to 4PM. It will feature open discussions among Baltimore searchers of all stripes-- historians, political scientists, lawyers, journalists, archivists, preservationists and city planners telling of their books.

A panel on publishing hard copy in a digital age includes Howell S. Baum, Urban Studies and Planning Program, University of Maryland, author of "Brown in Baltimore: School Desegregation and the Limits of Liberalism," Cornell University Press; Louis S. Diggs, author of eight books on African-American life and communities in Baltimore County; Antero Pietila, journalist, author of "Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City."

A panel on history across the disciplines includes Professors Emeritus David Bogen of University of Maryland School of Law, Matthew Crenson of Hopkins' Department of Political Science, and Jeffrey Sawyer, professor of History, University of Baltimore. Moderator is Kriste Lindenmeyer, chair of Department of History, University of Maryland Baltimore County.

An afternoon panel on sites and sources of city history includes Kathleen Kotarba, director of Baltimore City Commission for Historical & Architectural Preservation; Ellen VonKarajan, executive director of the Preservation Society of Federal Hill and Fell's Point, and Edward C. Papenfuse, Maryland State Archivist.

The complete Roundtable program can be found on the web pages of BCBS, [www.historicbaltimore.org/program/bulletinboard.htm](http://www.historicbaltimore.org/program/bulletinboard.htm) or the Maryland Historical Society [www.mdhs.org/](http://www.mdhs.org/) Register on-line for \$15 at [www.acteva.com/booking.cfm?bevaid=200505](http://www.acteva.com/booking.cfm?bevaid=200505). Registrants will receive a box lunch and talk by Gilbert Sandler, Baltimore's storyteller. The Roundtable is sponsored by BCBS, MHS and the University of Maryland School of Law.



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**From the President:  
 Remembering City's  
 Once Upon a Times**

By Michael S. Franch

When I moved to Baltimore, I looked at it as a historian and as a newcomer. The historian saw things that weren't there anymore, such as rich 19th-century suburban neighborhoods hidden under 20th-century urban blight. The newcomer learned about the recent past from neighborhood tales of what used to be but was no more, such as the bar that hung an upside-down Christmas tree from its ceiling every December. One day, I found myself pointing out places that in my own time used to be something else. The building that housed the bar with the upside-down Christmas tree? I helped defeat a liquor license transfer for what seemed a bogus operation, happily supported a Chinese restaurant's license application, and then sadly watched the restaurant fail. What was in the future when I moved here in 1974 had become neighborhood history!

We might not think of ourselves as doing historic things, but the way we live our lives, the documents we generate, the stories we tell, and the objects we use are the stuff of history. I'm glad that I kept all those files from our liquor license challenge. I'm glad a neighbor donated her father's 1920s photos of Waverly to a collection that could care for them. I worry that in these cash-strapped times Baltimore City will delay replacing the archivist, who has just retired, jeopardizing the City Archives and its treasures. All of us are makers of Baltimore history and all of us can do our part in collecting, protecting, and teaching that history. The Baltimore City Historical Society seeks to do its part. We hope you will help by joining us.

**Save June 12, Oct. 30 Dates** - The Society's annual meeting will take place on Saturday, June 12, probably at 10AM, and the Mayor's Reception and Awards Ceremony on Oct. 30.

**Lectures: Music, a Book**

The Society's second season of Baltimore History Evenings at the Village Learning Place began on Jan. 21 with Maureen Contreni, winner of the 2008 Joseph L. Arnold Prize for Outstanding Writing on Baltimore City History. And in the fifth of these six Thursday evening lectures, former Sun editorial writer Antero Pietila will speak May 20 on his new book, "Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City."

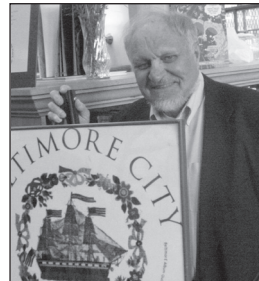


Photo by Mike Franch  
 Antero Pietila

Contreni spoke on "The Making of Enemy Aliens: German Jewish Refugees in Baltimore, 1937-44"--on how a federal judge here refused to grant U.S. citizenship to eligible German Jewish refugees during World War II. A notable litigant in the case was Simon Sobeloff, a major legal voice in the city.

The monthly third-Thursday evenings are at the former Pratt Library branch, 2571 St. Paul Street in Charles Village. They are free, with refreshments at 7 and lecture at 7:30. Although the first night was snowy, the turnout was not far from the often full houses of 65 during the series.

On Feb. 18, Emeritus Professor Garrett Power of Maryland's law school spoke on "Three Baltimore Plaintiffs"--referring, he said, to an apologist for lynching who championed black power; a Christian capitalist-Socialist socialite, and a rapacious raider remembered as a narcissistic philanthropist.

On March 18, Wayne Schaumburg, whose tours of Green Mount Cemetery are a favorite of history-minded, spoke on "A Hot Time in the Old Town! The Great Baltimore Fire of 1904," using photos of the devastation but also contemporary shots of buildings that were restored. This was a major factor in what he described the city's first renaissance, after the fire.

On April 15, about the time of this issue's publication, David Hildebrand brings music to the Learning Place with "The Star Spangled Banner and Beyond: Music in Baltimore c.1812." He has been performing professionally since 1980, mostly with his wife Ginger, focusing on early American music. He teaches at Peabody Conservatory. Following Pietila's talk on May 20, the lecture season will conclude on June 17 with Jayme Hill on "From the Brothel to the Block: The Abolition of Prostitution in Baltimore During the Progressive Era." She received honorable mention in the 2008 Arnold Prize competition.

**Franks - Continued from Page 1**

of females to the contrary. When his cat got loose, they'd claim to have drowned it in the Patapsco. "But not your father," recalled Franks. "Your father was never cruel." He respected Franks for his education and perhaps wanted something similar, but less eccentric, for me: the turning of pages over the turning of wrenches. But common sense told him that artistic monkeyshines and the shot-and-a-beer world of gin mills like Zeppie's were irreconcilable. "He's lucky one of those guys didn't throw him overboard," said Dad.

Franks once prevailed upon the great Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges to autograph the spot on his chest above his beating heart. But the magic trick that tickled me most was the tugboat symphony, requiring the cooperation of the same men who'd given him a hard time. Though he has a dissertation's worth of theory behind this "non-futile exercise in futility," the greater achievement is having persuaded a half-dozen captains to toot in a certain cadence.

More than 20 years after "Whistling in the Dark," I hosted a reading in my Macon Street row house, where my father had grown up before going to sea as a teenager. Franks and I were friends by then, having met at the Orpheum Cinema above what used to be Mooney's Rope Shop on Thames Street.

Franks arrived with a tray of kiszka -- a Polish delicacy of buckwheat groats, pork and beef blood. Across the kitchen, my father saw David for the first time in two decades-- at, of all places, his boyhood home -- and they shook hands in acknowledgment of tales saved for another day.

*The father, Manuel Alvarez, added:*

Franks had more education and prettier girls with him than anyone had ever seen on Broadway. The guys on the boats gave him quite the hard time because he was different from anything those old World War II commandoes had ever run into. So how he got them to agree to blow those whistles while he conducted the "orchestra" is beyond me. They all thought he wasn't playing with a full deck, if you want to know the truth. I guess a couple of cases of beer go a long way with a tugboat crew. After he did that thing with the whistles, I pretty much forgot about him. Not that you ever really forget a guy like that.

Then about 20 years later I was at my son's house for one of those literary readings and who is in the basement with a plate of kiszka? Franks! He still looked the same. I shook his hand and we talked about the tugboats and the whistles. After he became friends with Ralphie, we all started calling him Footlong.

**Polish Emigres - Continued from Page 1**

money in response to their questionable tales of financial woe. Twardowski worked in Baltimore for decades but has no true home and no family, all of which becomes the issue as he tries to decide to whom he should leave his modest legacy. A distant relative in Pennsylvania proves too uncaring as Twardowski lies in a hospital much like Johns Hopkins, with a lobby "dominated by an oversized statue of Christ." In the end, he leaves his estate to the relatives in Poland, although he recognizes them as "vultures" who had been taking advantage of his generosity. "Vultures they are, but they are poor," he says.

Throughout the novel, Broadway and its market are richly evoked, as here: "Broad Street was Blazej's [Twardowski's] home. He knew it by heart and could recognize in the dark all the uneven places on its sidewalks, all the cracks, the rough walls of the aging houses along the street, the dark hallways, and smelly courtyards. In the middle of Broad Street, where the commercial area gives way to the harbor district -- to shady dives, dingy bars, and rooms for rent sheltering the scum of the city -- there stands a rectangular wooden barn, an old firehouse perhaps, now turned into a food market. During the day it is full of life and the moist smells of fresh vegetables, freshly baked bread, and Polish smoked sausages. At night it becomes a shelter for tramps, where drunkards lie on the fish and meat counters until a policeman's nightstick chases them away."

The story about Twardowski came from Mostwin's father, represented in the text by the storefront owner who arranges to send Twardowski's contributions to importing relatives abroad. "He heard these stories. He brought them home, and she [Mostwin] would write them down," her son Jacek Mostwin said. "It was a clerical office where human stories were the currency of exchange," he added, comparing it to the London law offices where Charles Dickens, working as a clerk, mined material.

Mostwin's themes, focusing on the immigrant experience of forging a new identity from the heritage left behind and the strange new culture, had universal reach. In a collection of short stories, with the translated title "Asteroids", she compares these émigrés to the planetary fragments flying off in different directions after a collision. "They lived with the illusion that they had a stability, but in fact they were adrift," her son said. She honors this struggle in her concept of a "third value." In a 1976 essay, "Uprootment and Anxiety,"

she described "the creation of a new form of cultural identity that is neither with the country of origin nor with the receiving country, but constitutes a third value, the integration of selective cultural patterns specific for the individual and for his unique situation of uprootment."

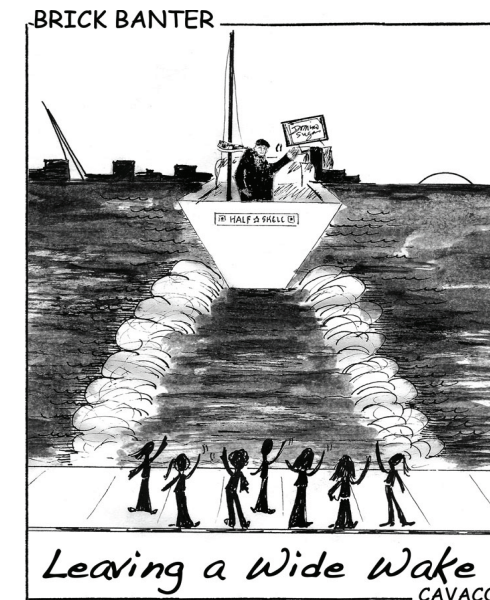
Mostwin's writing entered a new phase after she completed a doctorate in social work at Columbia University, and began teaching at Catholic University. From an intense correspondence with an aunt in Poland, she began reaching into Polish history and her family's role within it. A key figure in novels from this period was a priest in the mid-19th century who forged a papal document urging the peasants to rise up against a previous Russian occupation. This too was a true story. The priest character was modeled on a great-great uncle who was exiled to Russia, then allowed to return, managing both journeys on foot, her son said. "She anchors her personal identity in this strong, national Catholic tradition, this bull-headed resistance to political domination."

Wider recognition came to Mostwin in the 1990s, oddly enough through a former minister under the last Polish Communist regime. The minister, who had become a scholar of Polish émigré literature, wrote an academic treatise on Mostwin and her "third value" concept. Awards flowed from the Polish government. She was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006 and 2007.

Mostwin published in Polish 20 novels--seven available at the Enoch Pratt Free Library--collections of short stories and several academic monographs. She had always wanted to write, she explained in a 2007 interview with the literary journal, *The Baltimore Review*.

Even for a "born writer" to write in earnest though, "what is needed is a crisis." Hers was "the uprootment and anxiety, the destruction of a home country" during the war, her son said. "At a time when many people her age were going to college, my mother was witnessing public executions and round-ups."

Coming to America in response to that crisis, she wrote fiction exclusively in Polish, about Poles, while providing sharply drawn descriptions of the adopted country, Baltimore in particular. "She knew that looking backwards-only was very limited. At the same time, assimilation was an illusion," Jacek Mostwin said. "Just as [Ralph Waldo] Emerson said every generation has to write its own books, every individual must create their own identity, for which there is often no good model."



**Deaths: Keith, of Harbor;  
 Dr. Beirne, U of Baltimore**

This winter of extraordinary snows also recorded major losses among the city's history-minded--not only the two dominating the front page of this issue but Robert C. Keith, 78, author of "Baltimore Harbor: A Picture History," and Daniel Randall Beirne, 85, professor of sociology and history at the University of Baltimore.

Keith came to the harbor 31 years ago, having retired from *The Washington Post* after a heart attack. Initially he lived on a Skipjack, gathering material for his book. He moved ashore in Fell's Point and became an intensely engaged community leader, but he always had a boat ready for any civic occasion. The last of them was the Half-Shell, an aged buy boat he rescued from a mud flat in Virginia. He educated youngsters about the bay by putting them upon it.

The city's transportation issues, particularly the proposed Red Line east-west light rail, became Keith's full-time focus. Ever the goad, he cried out for more public participation. He exasperated traffic engineers with questions that pointed out potholes in their plans. The governor saw to it that Keith was named to a Red Line Citizens Advisory Committee. He died Feb. 28.

Beirne, said Frederick Rasmussen in *The Sun*, was "a West Pointer and retired Army officer who later had a second career" as "an authority on Baltimore history." His experience as a platoon leader in the Korean War led to his being historian of record for the city's memorial to that war erected in Canton in 1990. Beirne died Feb. 4. He was a frequent contributor to *The Sun* op-ed page, on topics including Hampden's red necks and patriots."