

## West-Side Seton Hill Melds Religious and Racial Skeins

By Elizabeth Nix, Ph.D  
University of Baltimore

Seton Hill might befuddle the most devoted Baltimore history buff. It is named after Mother Seton, but was she an Oblate Sister? Was Johns Hopkins University originally located there? Is the park at its center public or private? When was all the modern housing built? Is it possible to drive into the neighborhood from the north? Why do all of its streets direct drivers back onto Martin Luther King Boulevard? Was "Hill" defined differently in the 19th century? The curious will be rewarded; a little digging reveals that the neighborhood tucked around St. Mary's Seminary and Orchard Street Church is a microcosm of 200 years of Baltimore's history of religious tolerance, institutional innovation, racial upheaval, and urban renewal.

The neighborhood's first anchor institution was established in 1791 when priests of the Society of Saint Sulpice founded St. Mary's Seminary. This oldest Roman Catholic seminary in the United States operated on gracious grounds of St. Mary's Street for over 150 years. In the new republic, the presence of a Catholic institution attracted Haitian immigrants fleeing revolution. Fifty-three boats from Saint-Domingue (Hispaniola) landed in Baltimore in 1793, and many of their

## Shunned, Free Blacks Set Up Own Churches

By Dr. Matthew Crenson

For half a century before the Civil War, Baltimore held the largest concentration of free black people in the United States. By 1830, the city's population of 80,000 included 14,000 free African Americans, and by 1860 -- before President Lincoln had emancipated a single slave -- 92 percent of black Baltimoreans were free.

The city's free black population reached the critical mass needed to sustain independent institutions sooner than African American communities elsewhere. Church congregations were the earliest to emerge. The first of them -- a (Continued on Page 4)

## Religion, Race, Neighborhood in Turbulent City



Photos by Lewis H. Diuguid

*Orchard Street Church, built by West Baltimore blacks in 1882, was renovated by the Urban League and is site of Mayor's Reception. It figures large in accounts on this page focused on the roles of religion and race in the history of the city, particularly its west side, the primary site of protest and destruction in April.*

occupants moved to the area. In 1806 the seminary added St. Mary's College to serve students who wanted a Catholic education but to pursue the priesthood, and the area became a destination for elite Baltimore.

As Grace Hausmann Sherwood reported on the seminary's sesquicentennial: "The best people sent their sons to [St. Mary's College]. On its roster are names familiar to Baltimoreans: Bowie, Spence, Warfield. Shriver, Jenkins, Carroll, Patterson, Bonaparte, Latrobe, Paca, McHenry, Horwitz, McKim, Merrick, Glenn, Hambleton, Lowry, O'Donovan, John and Nelson Poe. . . . Boys came from outside Maryland [including] John Payne Todd, who was Dolly [sic] Madison's son."

This biracial Catholic community thrived, claiming three significant "firsts": The first neo-gothic building in America, St. Mary's Chapel (1806-08) designed by Maximilian Godefroy, still stands beside St. Mary's Park. Elizabeth Ann Seton, (Continued on Page 3)

## Society, Public to Honor Mayor, Historians Oct. 24

President James Kraft of the Baltimore City Historical Society will open its 15th Mayor's Reception and History Honors ceremony at 2PM on Saturday, October 24, in the historic Orchard Street Church in West Baltimore. The Public is invited, \$25 tickets will be available at the door, and drinks and refreshments served.

Remarks are expected from Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and radio-television-tour guide personality Thomas Saunders will speak on the history of the Orchard church, the city's oldest standing structure built by African Americans. Its history goes back to 1825, when Truman Pratt, then a freeman, but born a slave in 1775 near Hope Chapel, started a prayer meeting, most likely in a dwelling, according to the church documents. The original church structure dated to 1837, with subsequent additions as the congregation grew. That church was founded by Pratt, Basil Hall, and Cyrus Moore, all free black men, and deeded to them in 1839. "The building itself was erected by slaves and black freedmen, who worked by torchlight in the night."

Orchard Street Church was recognized as a separate Methodist church in the 1840s. Divisions within the church did not impede growth and the current larger building was erected in 1882. With subsequent membership expansions, the congregation found new quarters in 1972. (Continued on Page 7)

## Religious 'Goon Squad' Led Church into Streets

By C. Fraser Smith

They were regarded in some white quarters as thugs, ungoverned by conventions of good manners or by the dictates of their spiritual calling. Most of them were ministers. And they were black, recommitted and militant strivers for justice and equality. Someone called them a bunch of goons. They embraced the label, expanded it with dignity and pride. They were men of stature and respect in their communities.

"Some eleven kin- (Continued on Page 5)

Chair of Board of Directors... John C. Murphy  
President..... James B. Kraft  
Newsletter Editor..... Lewis H. Diuguid  
Newsletter Layout..... Tina Fleming Warren  
Staff..... Don Torres  
bchs@mdhs.org • baltimorecityhistoricalsociety.org

## ***From the President*** **Must History Keep Repeating?**

By James B. Kraft

In 1968, I watched fires burn from the front of my home in northeast Baltimore. In 2015, I watched them from the rear of my home in southeast. In 1968, they were in reaction to the death of a great man, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In 2015, they were in reaction to the death of a flawed man, Freddie Gray.

In both instances the properties burned were in our poorest neighborhoods, which were largely inhabited by African Americans. They were burned by African Americans and, while those who owned the properties were by and large not African Americans, those served by the businesses renting those buildings were.

So much has been written and said over the last half-century and over the last few months analyzing all of this. Yet, the recent events do call out for comment. There is no justification for the wanton destruction of property. It was a dishonor to the memory of both Dr. King and Mr. Gray. One may, collectively or individually, voice sadness, frustration and anger over these deaths, as violent and unwarranted as both were, through the peaceful yet powerful protest employed with such success by Dr. King himself.

For many that was not enough. Yet, the havoc they wrought has largely been brought upon themselves. Many say that nothing has changed in the half century between the riots, and thus what more could one expect? But this is a vastly different world than that of 1968. I think that the deeper question may rest not in the fires of 1968 and 2015, but in the continuing and increasing violence within the African American community today. And there is no question that the violence has been increasing.

Why is all of this important to the Baltimore City Historical Society? Once largely white, the majority of the city population has been African-American for almost two generations. Much of Baltimore's earlier history is also that of African Americans—a focus of articles in this issue. The races' futures, too, are intimately intertwined.

As I wrote last month, our city has a rough-and-tumble past. We were "mob town"

## **Montebello Water--100 Years**

By Don Torres

On a warm September 19, many hundreds visited the Montebello Water Filtration Plant on the 100th anniversary of its dedication—then an architectural and engineering wonder, on an even hotter September 13, 1915. That landmark in the history of Baltimore's quest to provide fresh, safe drinking water to the region was described in the spring issue of this newsletter by Kurt L. Kocher, Baltimore City Department of Public Works, who also spearheaded the planning for the centennial celebration.

Prior to the opening of Montebello Filtration Plant I, the water needs of the rapidly growing population were exceeding the city's capacity to provide them. The centennial event offered entertainment, bike rides, educational booths, disc golf, an antique fire engine and antique cars, food-truck refreshments, and "history row," where city and county historical societies helped deliver the history of the Lake Montebello area over the past 200 years. A time capsule is being filled with today's "artifacts" for 2115.

politically. We have always been a "Southern city." In one century President Lincoln could not stop here for fear of assassination. A mayor was placed in jail. In the next century, we kept blacks and Jews out of our neighborhoods. There is much in our history that is unpleasant, uncomfortable and unacceptable. It is our history, though, and we must live with it. While African Americans have lived with it, they also suffered and struggled through it more than most. In many ways the majority of their community have made it into the mainstream. In talent, intellect, professions and leadership, African Americans are integral to the daily life of our city. It does not work without them.

But, at the other end of the spectrum, in far too many worn down corners of Baltimore, poor, jobless and struggling, crime-ridden and drug-infested, there are also far too many African Americans. Many see no future, no way out, particularly angry young men. This is where we can begin: in neighborhoods with little to lose, in communities with no future—where the property has been written off, both literally and figuratively.

A young man says: "Burn it down. Perhaps someone will realize that we are here, will see the conditions in which we live, will help us. Perhaps, someone will see that I exist. I am a person." Perhaps he will add, "I do want a future." So does our city -- to put right our past, to protect our present and to perfect our future. It's not too late -- for any of us.



*BCHS booth at historic Montebello Gatehouse was staffed by board member Mary Jane Arnold and Anne Torres, wife of board's Don Torres. They distributed a souvenir postcard with painting of the Gatehouse by recently joined board member Kathleen Kotarba.*

## **At Peale: Fund-Raiser Art**

The Cityscape 2015 Contemporary Plein Air Views of the Urban Landscape exhibit will open on Friday, October 23, at 7PM in the Peale Museum building, 225 N. Holliday Street. Sale of the artworks will benefit the Peale Center for Baltimore History and Architecture, which is renovating and restoring the building. Recovery of the 1814 building was a founding goal of BCBS, which continues its support. For the first time since the Peale closed in 1997, the nation's oldest museum building will welcome the public to a major art exhibit.

Organized by the Mid-Atlantic Plein Air Painters Association, the exhibit features new works by about 50 artists painted en plein air ("in the open air") in seven major northeast corridor cities from New York to Richmond. Plein Air artists paint what they see outdoors in the atmospheric conditions that exist instead of in a studio. The Mid-Atlantic has 300 members.

The Peale Museum, a National Historic Landmark, has been many things in its 200 years: one of the earliest American natural history and art museums, our first City Hall, the Male and Female Colored School No. 1, and Baltimore's Municipal Museum. It also has a distinguished history of showcasing local and regional artists. It is now embarking on a new life as a history and architecture center—and a place to learn about, discuss, and plan a renewed Baltimore.

Cityscape's first hour, 7–8, is a ticketed reception for participating artists and patrons; from 8–10 pm the exhibit is free and open to the public. Valet parking, music. The exhibit continues, free and open to the public, on October 24, 25, and 31 and November 1, 10 AM–5PM. For more information, [thepealecenter.org](http://thepealecenter.org).

## Seton Hill - Continued from page 1

the first native-born American to be canonized, opened a school in the basement of the chapel in 1808 before moving to Emmitsburg, where she founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. The Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first Roman Catholic order for women of African descent, organized on the property as well. In 1837, black Protestants built Orchard Street Church, now the oldest building constructed by African Americans in Baltimore. German and Bohemian Catholics settled along Pennsylvania Avenue as the century progressed.

In 1876 Johns Hopkins, America's first research university, began operations around the corner from the seminary, in an area bounded by Eutaw and Howard Streets between Madison and Centre. In 1889, the hospital and medical school buildings opened on the east side, and during World War I, the segregated university moved the college and graduate schools to the Homewood campus. But for several decades, Hopkins made its mark on the Seton Hill neighborhood. It attracted City College High School, which hoped to provide a direct pipeline for its students by relocating near the university complex in the building, now apartments, known as Chesapeake Commons.

Hopkins professors, students and staff lived within walking distance of their classrooms and offices, sometimes in boarding houses that dotted the area. The wealthier favored the larger rowhouses in the new neighborhood along Eutaw Place between the campus and Druid Hill Park. Soon that fashionable district attracted German Jewish merchants who built mansions along the manicured boulevard.

When JHU vacated the area, many of its employees left fine big houses ready for new owners. Baltimore's black elite saw an opportunity to expand a neighborhood where African Americans had lived for a century, and Baltimore's black professionals began to move into the three-story rowhouses on 15 blocks of Druid Hill Avenue. Lawyers, doctors, government workers and teachers, including Thurgood Marshall's extended family, moved into the area. African-American institutions followed, including prominent churches and Provident Hospital, Baltimore's first black-owned and -operated hospital was established in 1894 on Orchard Street, moved to Biddle and finally settled on Division. By 1909 Booker T. Washington commented about Druid Hill Avenue, "So far as I know there is no city in the United States where the coloured population own so many comfort-



*This Sun map of Seton Hill and the newly built Harbor City boulevard soon became obsolete with its renaming to Martin Luther King Boulevard after 1968. It still shows the way to Orchard Street.*

able and attractive homes in proportion to the population as in the City of Baltimore."

In "Not in My Neighborhood," Antero Pietila chronicled the events that followed W. Ashbie Hawkins' purchase of 1834 McCulloh Street: whites fled the "negro invasion," and the neighborhood became Upton, the center of black culture in Baltimore before World War II. Blacks of different economic levels lived and worked in Upton, shopping and relaxing along Pennsylvania Avenue, the famed main street that bisects the neighborhood, and using the walkable streets that still connected them to Orchard and Druid Hill streets in Seton Hill.

Not everyone in the neighborhood could share in the good times. The expansion of the B&O Railroad Camden Yards around the turn of the century had displaced hundreds of poor black families, and some moved north near the elite black blocks. Many ended up in crowded alley houses that presented public health concerns in a district that came to be called Biddle Alley. When the city piped water into larger houses in the 1880s, Baltimore's alley houses had not been connected. The sewer system for the city was begun only in 1905 and took two decades to complete, so

between the wars the 215 houses in Biddle Alley were serviced by water pumps on the street, privies and a cesspool.

In one street known as the Lung Block, the death rate from tuberculosis was seven times the city-wide rate. Cholera and typhoid were common. The disease rate most likely caused the city to locate the first public bathhouse open to blacks at Preston and Argyle Streets in 1908. The federal government attempted to ease the housing crunch by building the McCulloh Homes, a segregated public housing complex that opened in 1941, but when war workers from Appalachia crowded into the blocks near the 5th Regiment Armory, the situation became even worse. Landlords divided their large houses into apartments and multiple families piled into the tiny alley houses.

After the war, city leaders looked at this side of town and saw irredeemable slums. They envisioned a new type of urban environment based on Le Corbusier's Radiant City, where massive roads moved people in and out of the metropolis and with tower complexes for city residents and workers. In 1959 the city razed blocks of rowhouses at the southern end of Upton to build Murphy Homes, five failed, infamous 11-story towers of public housing that were imploded in 1999. By 1961 the city, with support from Bolton Hill residents, developed 74 acres of the Mt. Royal Plaza slum-clearance project as the State Office Center, office blocks surrounded by parking lots. Nearby, the Social Security Administration consolidated its offices at a complex opened in 1980, bringing 3,500 workers into the area.

By 1982 portions of Fremont and other smaller streets would be replaced by a six-lane highway connecting the State Center with the Social Security buildings, Murphy Homes and I-395. Christened the Harbor City Boulevard but renamed a year later for the assassinated Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., runs through a district that had been filled with "slums as depressing as any in Baltimore," said the Baltimore Sun. In the 1970s the city partnered with the federal government and private entities to create Greenwillow Manor Apartments, Orchard Gardens and Orchard Mews, affordable housing intended to replace some of the historic houses it had destroyed to build the throughway.

While public and private entities were razing some neighborhoods and developing low- and moderate-income housing around MLK, private homeowners were rehabbing homes in Seton Hill. The seminary had tried unsuccessfully to sell (Continued on Page 6)

## Free Blacks - Continued from page 1

group of black Methodists – came together in 1787 and initially held their services in their homes. Later they worshiped in a building on Sharp Street in South Baltimore that housed the Maryland Society for the Abolishment of Slavery and the Baltimore African Academy, the city's first school for black children. In 1802 the Sharp Street Methodist Church acquired its own building and assumed responsibility for the school. Many of the black congregations that came after the Sharp Street church also combined worship and education. There would be no public schools for African American students until 1867.

Methodism's early appeal to African Americans was rooted in its emphasis on equality and opposition to slavery. In 1784 a church conference held in Baltimore decreed that no one holding an official position in the denomination could own slaves, and the Methodist laity could own slaves only for a fixed term of service, then to be freed.

The pronouncement provoked angry division within the recently founded denomination, and although the church's anti-slavery statement remained its formal policy, practice fell far short of official principle. In effect, the anti-slavery ruling was abandoned. Black Methodists in Baltimore would soon be seated in segregated pews at the rear of the sanctuary. The founders of the Sharp Street church avoided this indignity. They had already departed to form this own entirely black congregation.

Congregational segregation was soon an accepted norm. In 1801, when the Strawberry Alley Church in Fell's Point acquired a new building on Wilk Street, it left its old church building to its African American worshippers. The Methodists were the only religious denomination at the time that actively welcomed black members, but not necessarily to worship with whites.

Daniel Coker emerged as a pivotal leader among Baltimore's black Methodists. He had fled from slavery on a farm near Frederick, where he had learned to read. He continued his education in New York, where he was ordained as a Methodist deacon. In 1809 or 1810 he returned to Baltimore as a teacher in the school associated with the Sharp Street church. Local Quakers provided the funds to resolve his uncertain status by purchasing his freedom from his former master. He soon became his congregation's pastor.

The Sharp Street and Strawberry Alley churches operated under the authority of the state's Methodist Conference and the two ministers that the Conference assigned

## City's Day; Centennial Homes

On August 8, BCHS members celebrated the first Baltimore Day, decreed in a bill introduced by Councilman James B. Kraft marking that day in 1729 when the colonial powers granted Baltimore a town charter. The ceremony with the mayor at City Hall also included introduction of 10 families that--research by Baltimore Heritage finds--have lived in their city homes continuously for at least 100 years.

to Baltimore. No black preachers were ordained as ministers, and their status had to be renewed annually by the denomination's officials, all of whom were white. Members of the Sharp Street church became increasingly dissatisfied with their subordinate status, and in 1814 Coker led a secession movement that left Sharp Street to form a new, autonomous black Methodist congregation, the African Methodist Bethel Society housed in a building on Fish Street (now Saratoga Street).

In 1816, Coker was invited to a meeting in Philadelphia called by Richard Allen, the pastor of an all-black congregation in that city. The principal result of the conference was the founding of a new, self-governing religious denomination – the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Baltimore's Bethel A.M.E. was one of its original members, and Coker became one of its two bishops.

What had begun as a split between white and black Methodists now developed into a division among African Americans. Coker found himself as unwilling partisan in a bitter conflict between his Bethel church and his former Sharp Street church. Convinced that the battle was weakening both, Coker decided in 1820 to accept the invitation of the American Colonization Society to sail on its first ship to Liberia so that he could "leave all these divisions behind in America" and return to the continent of his ancestors.

The emergence of black churches was critical for the transformation of Baltimore's African population from a disjointed collection of in-migrants from the countryside into a self-conscious community with a sense of collective identity. But community did not mean harmony. African American Methodists outnumbered by far black Baltimoreans belonging to other denominations. But black Methodists were divided among those who attended church with whites, those who worshipped in all-black congregations like the one on Sharp Street, and those who left the Methodist Episcopal denomination to join an African Methodist Episcopal church like Bethel A.M.E. Other black Baltimoreans be-

came Baptists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics. By 1850, according to historian Christopher Phillips, Baltimore had "the greatest denominational variety of black churches of any city in the nation."

Along with division came conflict. One of the first great controversies began at about the time that Coker departed for Liberia, from which he continued to promote the cause of African colonization. Back in Baltimore, William Watkins was a fierce critic of the colonization movement. He had succeeded Coker as principal teacher at the Sharp Street school and later became one of the Church's preachers. He challenged a key assumption advanced by the white proponents of colonization – that free African Americans and white Americans could never live together as equal citizens. Since equality of citizenship was one of the nation's founding principles, the presence of black sub-citizens posed a fundamental dilemma for American democracy, and whites recommended their departure for Monrovia as its solution.

Watkins also addressed his fellow African Americans: "Why should we abandon our firesides and everything associated with the dear name of home – undergo the fatigues of a perilous voyage, and expose our wives and little ones to the deleterious influence of an uncongenial sun, for the enjoyment of a liberty divested of its usual accompaniments, surrounded with circumstances which diminish its intrinsic value?" Better "to die in Maryland under the pressure of unrighteous and cruel laws than be driven, like cattle, to the pestilential clime of Liberia."

Unlike Watkins, many black religious leaders in Baltimore supported African colonization. In 1835, Watkins stood in opposition to three of the city's leading black ministers, including the pastor of his own church. They had issued a statement asserting that their community favored colonization. Watkins challenged their claim to speak for black Baltimore. A more fundamental problem, perhaps, was that no one could claim to speak for all of black Baltimore.

In a letter to William Lloyd Garrison, Watkins claimed that the black ministers had threatened him with a coat of tar and feathers, and that a meeting in Baltimore County had discussed what might be done to silence his vocal support of abolition and his attacks on African colonization. Watkins, like Daniel Coker, escaped the conflicts of Baltimore by emigration, not to Africa, but to Canada.

Today the Sharp Street Methodist Church and Bethel A.M.E. stand little more than one block apart in harmony in West Baltimore.

## 'Goon Squad' - Continued from page 1

dred souls dreamed of a more perfect city that could be attained by political empowerment," wrote Homer Favor in a retrospective essay. A Morgan State University professor and member of the squad, Favor never lost the ardor of his early civil rights involvement. His ministerial allies had adopted a new role, moving beyond the message of the pulpit to the demands of the street.

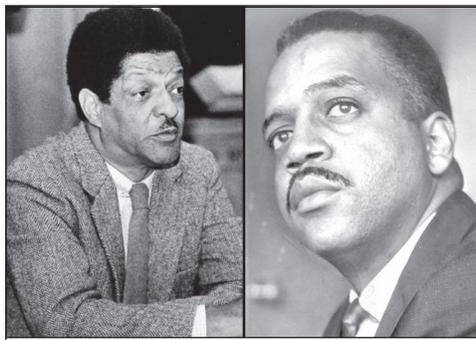
White America had tamped down protest by invoking the conventions of polite behavior. Truth-telling protest was impolite. That accusation plus some readings of black church doctrine muted the black church's voice, its churches. The most charismatic black leaders were sidelined as well. I found myself thinking of these men with the murder of the Rev. Clementa Pinckney last June in South Carolina. Senator Pinckney, pastor of Emanuel AME Church, reached for a very public role in his witness for equality. He became part of a sometimes sad and sometimes heroic continuum, part of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s faith in the arc of history.

Baltimore's Goon Squad had counseled with King about the movement's direction. Whatever it would be, their leadership was needed. Pinckney became a legislator. He had pushed for a bill requiring body cameras on police. He may well have become a target as a result of his involvement. Here too I saw a parallel. In 1968, after King's murder, members of the Goon Squad and others were summoned to a meeting by Maryland governor Spiro Agnew. They assembled in Agnew's Baltimore office on Preston Street.

As Agnew walked into the room he saw the Rev. Marion Bascom, who had been in the streets with other squad members urging an end to the violence and bloodshed. Agnew paused. "Every time I see you, I'm repulsed by you," said the governor. The minister had come to Agnew's attention during a number of civil right actions. A bit shaken no doubt, Bascom said, "That's a problem you'll have to overcome."

Bascom's response evoked the "grace" President Barak Obama cited in his sermon of tribute to Pinckney and his parishioners – several of whom sought out the alleged attacker to forgive him. Bascom adroitly turned the other cheek -- not without shifting the burden to the governor. Who knows if Agnew gave the moment a second thought. "We don't earn grace," Obama said in South Carolina. "We're all sinners. We don't deserve it. But God gives it to us anyway."

The Goon Squad's grace shown in the streets – as Pinckney's had. In 1967, Homer Favor recalled, "we electrified the city by



*The Rev. Vernon Dobson and Dr. Homer Favor*

honing the electoral process in order to place Judge Joseph C. Howard on the then Supreme Bench of Baltimore." One success led to another. "Two years later, Parren J. Mitchell, became the state's first black congressman."

When Howard, then an assistant state's attorney, declared his candidacy for judge, the Goons knew he could win. The unknown and politically untutored black candidate, Harry Cole, had won a state senate seat. He showed black voters and white political bosses that the black vote could be organized. The challenge might have been greater for them because the element of surprise that helped Cole was no longer there.

White Democratic ward boss Jack Pollack responded in the next election by running a black candidate – never having endorsed a black candidate before that. The goons were winning. Held together by wit, shared outrage and anger, they came from the black clergy's deep reservoir of eloquent and accomplished leaders.

Bascom, pastor of Brown Memorial Church on Bolton Hill, was an eloquent, scholarly wise man, with insight and humor.

The Rev. Vernon Dobson of Union Baptist Church, a few blocks west, was a deep-voiced jester, whose passionate spirituality flew out of aching, ironic laughter. He described what it was like to grow up with Jim Crow in Baltimore:

"We couldn't sit at the counter of the white establishment, the beautiful White Coffee Pot, just about four blocks from us. You could go in and order a cup of coffee, but couldn't sit down, you had to stand outside to drink it. And the place was beautiful. I mean it was immaculate and for a boy, for a child, it was just a dream world. So I saw my mother and other church women fighting that issue at an early age and I think they were my heroines."

The Goon Squad became city fathers— not just for the black neighborhoods but for all of Baltimore. Yet, unlike Pinckney, who seems to have gained a multi-cultural following, Bascom and Dobson and Favor were honored in the black community almost ex-

clusively. A missed opportunity, no doubt.

Funerals are often called celebrations of life, and as the ranks of civil rights pathfinders have died, the celebratory quality has risen, transforming solemn moments into reflections on a singular period in U.S. history. The Goon Squad had not been moved. It had overcome – not just in some distant day but in its own day. Its leaders knew the struggle would never end but they knew also that, during their youth, too little had been accomplished, too little had been tried.

The willingness to accept the way things were had changed and they had changed it. The recognition was there in Judge Howard's funeral, presided over by Dobson and Favor. Their presence made the final hymn "It Is Well" seem a benediction -- not for a single man or for a dozen men with a mockingly proud name -- but for a generation or more of Americans who had faith in themselves and in the ideals of their country.

I asked Larry S. Gibson, of the University of Maryland Law School in Baltimore and author of "Young Thurgood: the Making of a Supreme Court Justice," about any current "Goons." He said, "There really are no successors to these guys." The times are different, with different demands. They were simply right for their time. I am inclined to accept Gibson's view on this. There certainly is nothing like a "squad" now. The players are single shooters of varying effectiveness.

*Smith is author of "Here Lies Jim Crow: Civil Rights in Maryland." The title is drawn from the belief that school desegregation and the end of Jim Crow sanctions began at the University of Maryland in a case argued by Thurgood Marshall.*



*Members of the Patterson Park Charter School Fife and Drum Corps salute presentation of the seven cannon defending Hampstead Hill in the War of 1812 as restored by a Star-Spangled 200 grant. Baltimore Heritage helped lay on the September 13 program, hard by the Pagoda.*

## Seton Hill - Continued from page 3

property to the city in 1921, and although the city considered building the proposed Coloured High School at the site, it ultimately declined. St. Mary's then suggested to the Baltimore Baseball Club that the grounds would make a good ballpark, but that idea was also rejected. With no takers, the church held onto the property but relocated many of its operations. By the end of the 1920s they had moved some seminarians to St. Charles College in Catonsville and raised enough money to buy property in Roland Park where they would construct the replica of Versailles at the corner of Northern Parkway and Roland Avenue.

In the late '50s St. Mary's property seemed sealed from its surroundings, behind a massive brick wall. Cemented on its capstones were jagged shards of whisky bottles set to fend off intruders or, according to some, to keep in the students. In 1969, the Paca Street site sent its last seminarians to the suburbs. Many of the homes around St. Mary's stood vacant. Carleton Jones wrote in the Sun in 1973, "Baltimore's near west side - with its vandalized churches, vacant storefronts, the ugly unplanned sprawl of the University Hospital complex and [winos] without number - has always ranked in recent years as one of local real estate's disaster areas. This was the place where you literally could not give property away."

Jones reported, though, that by the mid-



*St. Mary's Chapel, 1808, designed by Maximilian Godefroy, by Seton Hill Park.*

1970s Seton Hill had been coming back for over a decade. Individuals of both races were rehabbing historic houses. In 1964 Claude and Ann McKensie bought a house on a block on Druid Hill Avenue where most of the others were vacant. Years later Ann told a reporter that after seeing in the abandoned Stanley Theater on Howard Street a walnut doorframe that would fit perfectly in her Seton Hill dining room, she took a crowbar to the site to remove it herself. A man there told her, "Lady, if you can take that thing down, you can have it for \$15."

In a phenomenon known to other urban areas, the district had not one but two competing neighborhood associations. Despite rivalries they held an annual house tour and petitioned the city to destroy one block of vacant houses on Orchard Street. The Arena Players, currently the oldest operating black theater in the country, joined the renovators in 1966 when they moved to a warehouse at 406 Orchard. They expanded the facility ten years later. The city acknowledged the historic importance of the still racially mixed Seton Hill by designating it one of the early Baltimore City Historic Districts in 1968.

The area received national recognition when St. Mary's Chapel was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1971, followed by the Mother Seton House at 600 N. Paca in 1972. During the early 1970s the seminary buildings housed the Model Cities Program, which trained women reentering society from prison in the arts of keypunch. St. Mary's tried to interest the city or a private developer in adaptive reuse of the four-story dormitory, but Frank Vidor, the head of planning for the Department of Housing and Community Development, could see no future for it. "It's solidly built, but that's about all you can say," he told the Sun, calling the 1876 building "a monster." The city bought

it and six acres of surrounding land in 1973, demolished the building, and established the public park. In 1975, the area bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue, Franklin, Eutaw, McCulloh and Orchard Streets was added to the National Register.

However, historical status did not protect the neighborhood completely from the urban street planners. As Gerald Neily observed in a blog post from 2006, "The circulation in the triangular portion of Seton Hill inside MLK Boulevard, Druid Hill Avenue and Eutaw Street defies description. Inside this 'Bermuda Triangle' are by far the most disastrously designed intersections in the urban city." This traffic pattern may have made a number of Baltimoreans by-pass the area, contributing to the time-capsule aspect of seemingly hill less Seton Hill. But it may not remain obscure for long. In 2014, City Paper named Seton Hill Baltimore's Best Neighborhood.

## Seton Hill Assaulted, Resilient

The president of the now unified Seton Hill neighborhood Association, Kevin Macartney, said the community of more than 500 families, still broadly mixed racially, saw looting/fire damage to six commercial properties during the April riots. Two stores on Eutaw Street were severely damaged. Clearly, he added, the MLK Boulevard that isolates Seton Hill failed to protect it. He called the broken street pattern a major impediment but said families continue to buy into Seton Hill and to improve it, and to turn out for its annual October French Fair. Macartney, 35, has lived in Seton Hill 12 years, commuting to the Defense Department in Washington. "This is our second Best Neighborhood Award," he said.



*Once a seminary, city park is Seton Hill haven with a recently revived fountain.*

## City and County Societies To Meet in Back River

The Baltimore City Historical Society and the Historical Society of Baltimore County will hold their fourth joint meeting on Saturday, November 14, at 2PM in the Back River Treatment Plant Auditorium, 8201 Eastern Boulevard in Essex (21224-3504). No registration is required. Free parking and refreshments. The Baltimore City Department of Public Works is host.

Sponsored by Baltimore City Historical Society & Historical Society of Baltimore County. Featured speakers: Morgan Grove, Baltimore Ecosystem Study; Paige Glotzer of Johns Hopkins University and Kurt Kocher of Public Works.

## Mayor - Continued from page 1

Despite placement on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975, the building was unoccupied and at risk until the Greater Baltimore Urban League moved offices into it in 1992. It is also listed as a landmark by the city Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, noted for its Romanesque style and Gothic window on the northeastern facade.

The church history continues, "While its exact role is not certain, tunnels under the church were long associated with the Underground Railroad, and the Orchard Street Church was reportedly a stop on Harriet Tubman's passage to freedom. Archaeology completed during the church's restoration in 1992 uncovered one such space associated with the Underground Railroad, which has been made accessible by stairway." Guests will be offered a guided tour of the church, including access to the tunnel entry.

The Society's History Honors to be awarded at the reception:

**HISTORIAN/SCHOLARS**, persons who have published as members of the academic and professional community: **Jerome R. Garitee** had a lengthy career teaching history in Baltimore County schools and Essex Community College. He also wrote "The Republic's Private Navy," explaining how the system of privateering functioned in Baltimore during the War of 1812. Thomas Boyle, commanding the Chasseur, also dubbed the Pride of Baltimore, was the best known privateer, capturing 18 ships.

**Deborah Rudacille** grew up in Dundalk, a descendent of steel workers at Sparrows Point. In "Roots of Steel" she narrates the story of steel-making that began in 1887, by the company that became Bethlehem Steel in 1916. At its peak in 1959 it employed 36,000 workers.

**LIVING HISTORY**, to persons who exemplify civic enhancement: **Martin O'Malley**, former mayor and governor, took to national and international audiences the stories of the Battle and Bombardment of Baltimore and the writing of the Star-Spangled Banner in the War of 1812.

**Bill Pencek** directed the Governor's Maryland Bicentennial Commission for the Star-Spangled 200 celebration of the war, showcasing it for residents and visitors. Through grants, Star-Spangled 200 assisted others in resource stewardship, education, tourism and economic development projects that assured Marylanders and millions of visitors had the opportunity to benefit from the

bicentennial activities.

**The family of Irving H. W. Phillips Sr.**, who started working for the Baltimore Afro-American as a photojournalist in 1949, documenting a side of Baltimore most of the mainstream press overlooked. He headed the photography department and after retiring in 1973 he operated Phillips Photo in Oldtown Mall until 1980. He died in 1993. Irving Phillips Jr. first worked for the Afro-American and then as a photographer for The Sun, retiring in 1993. While his assignments covered all aspects of the city, he also continued his father's work in documenting life in the African-American community.

Webster Phillips III is a photojournalist. His work has been published in the Afro-American and other area papers. He has taken stewardship of his family's legacy and has begun a project to scan as many of his grandfather's 50,000 photos as possible to place them on line. Frank W. Phillips Jr., brother of Irving H.W. Phillips Sr., also worked as a photographer for the Afro-American and as head of the Photography/Engraving Department until his death in 1962. His son, Benjamin M. Phillips IV worked in the same department at the Afro-American in the 1960s-70s. He is president of the Afro-American. The work of the Phillips, celebrating the African-American community, has been called, "an incredible social archive and reference."

**N MEMORIAM: Rhoda Dorsey** began teaching at Goucher College as an assistant professor of history, oversaw the transition to co-education and after 40 years of service and 20 years as president, she retired in 1994 and continued to advise her college until her death last year.

**Valerie McNeal** served the city where she lived until her death at 64 in 2014. Long active in the First Unitarian Church, her love of history led her to the Baltimore City Historical Society, where she was a board member and secretary. An appreciation appeared in the spring Gaslight.

**Bishop L. Robinson Sr.** After graduating from Douglass High School in 1945, he served in the Army until joining the Police Department in 1952 as a foot patrolman. He became Baltimore's first African-American police commissioner in 1984. Three years later Governor William Donald Schaefer chose him as secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. In 2007, the city police headquarters was named for him. He died at 84 in 2014.

**June Wing**, a Chicago native, moved to Baltimore with her husband in 1949. In over



Urban League volunteer Jackie Cast has a look at "tunnel" opening beneath Orchard church. It will be on the tour.

six decades here, she was a political, social and environmental activist for peace, civil rights, professional and experimental ethics, gender and financial equality, and nuclear disarmament—and an opponent of building Interstate 95 through neighborhoods. She died in 2014 at 98.

For a map locating Orchard Street, see Page 3. Free parking is plentiful at Orchard and Pennsylvania Avenue, with parking for the handicapped in front of the church, a short block to the northeast.

## Village Lectures to Start With Touch of Bluegrass

This Society and the Village Learning Place in Charles Village are planning six Baltimore History Evenings for 2016 at the Learning Place, 2521 St. Paul Street. This will be the eighth year of the lectures, given on the third Thursday of each month through June. On January 21 Tom Newby, author of "Bluegrass in Baltimore: The Hard Drivin' Sound and Its Legacy," will draw on his book for "Appalachian Migrants and Bluegrass Music in Baltimore." A reception is at 7PM, the talk at 7:30. The lectures are free, contributions welcome.

On February 17, a panel will discuss "What to Do with Baltimore's Confederate Monuments?" On March 17, former Sun writer Antero Pietila's topic is "Journalists and Historians: Reporting the Present, Capturing the Past." His is the Grace Darin Memorial Lecture, named for the late Sun editor closely associated with establishment of Charles Village. On April 21, Louise Kelley and Richard Oloizia, author and editor of "LGBT Baltimore," will discuss that community, with illustrations. Topics for May 19 and June 16 are still under discussion by board members Mike Franch, founder of the series, and Elizabeth Nix.

## Electronic-Age Historians Chat on Society's Site

By Mike Franch

### Facebook Page Administrator

I like to hang around in my favorite coffee shop. I'll work on my laptop or catch up on my reading, energized by the bustle around me. I chat with the regulars or with new people I meet, sometimes having profound and informative conversations, sometimes just a pleasant passing of time, and occasionally having to put up with other people's crackpot ideas. They, of course, have to put up with mine.



That's the model for the Baltimore City Historical Society's Facebook page, one of the sites where Baltimore history buffs can go for serious, quirky, nostalgic, and inquisitive conversations about Baltimore history. And yes, sometimes even crackpot ideas; fortunately, unlike my coffee shop, there are administrators who try to keep these to a minimum.

The purpose of the page is "to share information about and enthusiasm for the history of Baltimore, Maryland." The unstated purpose is to act as an Internet coffee house, where people can seek and share information. For example, noted journalist and historian Antero Pietila will share his enthusiasm for an important book or article he has discovered and thinks others should know about.

Someone from across the country writes, "My grandparents lived on such-and-such address around World War I. Where was that?" The crowd provides the information! BCHS members post old photos, drawings, and artifacts, and even new photos that inspire discussions, reminding us of once-important Baltimore industries. A Baltimorean now living in Costa Rica took photos of an iron bridge, still in use on the Costa Rica-Panama border, built by the Baltimore Bridge Company in 1908.

Another member recently posted a link to an amazing video of the last day at the Carr Lowrey Glass Company, which ended 114 years of production in 2003. You can find news of upcoming tours of the Shot Tower or the Bromo Seltzer Tower and events at the stately and historic Clifton, Homewood, and Orianda ("Crimea") mansions and the non-profit Baltimore and Chesapeake Steamboat Company.

The Baltimore History Facebook page also offers a forum for people knowledgeable about city history but without another venue. They, and we, their readers, benefit from this. But, like my coffee shop, there are occasionally

## Arnold Prize Expands Understanding of City

The deadline for submittals by candidates for the \$500 Joseph L. Arnold Prize for Outstanding Writing on Baltimore's History is February 15, 2016. The prize is given by the Byrnes Family in memory of Joseph R. and Anne S. Byrnes, parents of BCHS founder Judge John Carroll Byrnes. Last year's co-winners were Deborah Weiner for "Insiders and Outsiders: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Baltimore During the Interwar Era," and Dennis Halpin with "'For My Race Against All Political Parties': Building a Radical African-American Activist Foundation in Baltimore, 1870s-1885."

Joseph L. Arnold, professor of history at

folks one would want to avoid. Unlike the coffee shop, the site's administrators try to keep out comments about current politics, and ads. Certain other inappropriate comments do not get on the site or are removed quickly.

A controversy over what to do about Confederate monuments, and whether Robert E. Lee Park should be renamed, stirred so many and wide-ranging comments that the moderators decided to cut off discussion for the time being. When the mayor's commission considering these issues releases its report there will be something substantive to base discussion on and the topic will open again.

the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, died in 2004 at 66 and is remembered as "dean of Baltimore historians." The shared '14 prize was presented at the Society's June 20 annual meeting.

Entries should be unpublished manuscripts, 15 to 45 double-spaced pages (including footnotes/endnotes). To submit, address a new e-mail message to [baltimorehistory@law.umaryland.edu](mailto:baltimorehistory@law.umaryland.edu); attach the entry as a document in MS Word or PC convertible format; include illustrations within the main document.

There will be a "blind judging" by a panel of historians. Criteria are: significance, originality, quality of research and clarity of presentation. The winner will be announced in spring 2016. BCHS reserves the right to not to award the prize. The winning entry will be posted on the Society webpage and considered for publication in the Maryland Historical Magazine. For further information: [baltimorehistory@law.umaryland.edu](mailto:baltimorehistory@law.umaryland.edu) or call retired law professor Garrett Power, 410.706.7661.

Entries for 2014 were judged by six scholars of Baltimore history chaired by Dr. Ed Orser, UMBC. Reviewers were impressed that both papers made excellent use of primary documents, developed original arguments, and contributed to an understanding of important aspects of Baltimore history.

The Baltimore City Historical Society Inc.  
c/o The Maryland Historical Society  
201 West Monument Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

