

Fell's Point Out of Time



Interview of Geoffrey Footner, 11/24/03

Interviewer Kraig B. Greff

[Kraig]

Could you talk a little about the founding of Fell's Point?

[Geoffrey]

Yes. The founding of Fells Point was very quiet and unassuming because it started basically as a place where vessels anchored to take on cargo or to discharge cargo for the nearby tobacco plantations. That was early in the 18th century. As we approached the middle of the 18th century, let's say 1750 or 60, more and more activity began to take place - shipping activity took place - on the Patapsco River. This was brought about by the fact that Baltimore Town and Fells Point developed as two villages, separate and a mile apart. Baltimore became the location of flour merchants, or grain merchants maybe is the better term. Fells Point became the place where the ships began to dock, the larger what we call "off-shore vessels" docked.

Baltimore Town was the ... at its location one mile further upstream, is right on the edge of what we call the fall line. The fall line is where you go from tide water, that is the rise and fall of the daily tide, to arising hills. And so that was the ideal conditions for bringing grain into the "basin" as they referred to it at that time, rather than the Inner Harbor. And at the basin, these small bay craft were discharged of their small cargos of wheat or oats or barley, and by oxen cart they were carried upward through the hills to various mills that were located along the streams, the main one being Falls... [cut brief discussion re name of stream]. So then the oxen returned the flour, the mill product, to the warehouses on the waterfront where they were transferred into what they called flats at the time, which were small intra-harbor barges. These barges were then moved directly to vessels anchored off Fells Point or later on as piers developed just prior to the Revolutionary War, they were loaded directly from the flats into the vessels. Still later on as warehousing developed in Fells Point, the flour was moved into warehouses where it was accumulated so that a ship could dock and get a full cargo of flour. So by that time, it was probably in the period of the American Revolution.

So those were the beginnings of the two cities. They remained separate for the next ... well that is actually right up until the end of the 18th century, about 20 years after the Revolutionary War.

[01:04:45:14]

[Kraig]

That's the next question here, the absorption into Baltimore.

[Geoffrey]

We can lead right into that. But before that, we should talk about the fact that these two villages were growing, but they were growing at a very small pace, slow pace, until the Revolution. Then, because of the previous switch from tobacco to grain throughout the Chesapeake Bay region all the way down to the southern Chesapeake Bay into Virginia, north into Cecil and Harford County, were now producing grain products rather than tobacco. That the region became the bread basket of the Revolutionary War. And so this grain was picked up in small bay craft and, as I said before, brought into Baltimore where it was milled, and then it was brought to Fells Point where it was put into warehouses and accumulated. Now at that point, it had two principle destinations. A gentleman by the name of Jesse Hollingsworth who lived in Jean [forgot her last name] at 1929 Fell Street was built by this gentleman Jesse Hollingsworth who was state agent, state shipping agent. He had two principle jobs - accumulating food products for George Washington's army which was fighting in the north. That portion of the products accumulated were delivered by small craft up to the head of the Elk River in Cecil County. Other cargoes were accumulated and delivered to the West Indies where they were exchanged for guns and gunpowder. And still other cargoes of Maryland grain and flour were loaded aboard larger vessels and delivered to France, along with tobacco and whatever product could be sold. There, they were exchanged for guns and uniforms and ...

[Short break to adjust mic - 01:08:10:11]

[Kraig]

Who built the guns at that time? Where was the United States getting their guns?

[Geoffrey]

Actually, there was some industry, some armaments, some guns, manufactured in the United States. There was one factory directly across the Patapsco River at what they call Whetstone Point, which is called Locust Point now. That was Principio Iron Works. Then there was another one, I don't know when it was started, on Curtis Creek, which was further out in the Harbor, that was operated by the Dorsey family. And then there was a third one up around Havre de Gras, and I don't recall that name.

[Kraig]

So they didn't really have to depend a lot on European guns? Because I was down in Williamsburg with Jacquie and I saw them manufacturing stocks, and Harpers Ferry ... I saw some guns ... I didn't know if they did the entire thing, but they did the rifling ... so people were actually able to take care of themselves here?

[Geoffrey]

Particularly they could handle big guns, because you just cast them really. And then you roll the round shot down into the ... after you put the powder in, so it was a rather simple mechanism. But I wouldn't go so far as to say that there was a highly complex ... of all types of armament, particularly

when you get into finer rifles and that sort of thing. I think probably this country had some dependence on France and England. It's a good study, actually, I'm not too sure about that....

[01:10:41:03]

Going back to Fells Point, during the Revolution, of course, this position as the logistics center for the Revolution was a very important factor in the growth of not only Baltimore but Fells Point. This was further accelerated by the fact that the little port complex at the head of the Patapsco River was the only major port that was not conquered or taken by the British. So that it gave it an even larger boost as far as growth is concerned during the Revolution. So if you were discussing the history of Fells Point/Baltimore over a long period of time, I think you could go back to the first house. But actually the Revolution is the time that changed it from just another small town, another small roadstead, into a major port. And that growth continued after the war, after the Revolution for a number of reasons.

As Fells Point grew as the deep water port for the region, it became ... the population grew and it became more and more of a separate town, and a town with some power because there were a great number of merchants here in Fells Point. In addition to the merchants, there were a number of very successful boat builders, ship builders, and of course there was a large supporting trade, of artisans, who supported that very important industry, ship building.

And though the City of Baltimore, or the Town of Baltimore I should say, had a greater concentration of wealth because the village was made up of merchants who dealt, of course, with flour and specie and the more tangible aspects, or maybe you call it the more intangible aspects of wealth, the well-to-do merchants of Baltimore, led by the Smith family, became quite jealous of the growing Fells Point, and the growing independence of Fells Point. So in 1796, after several tries and after some definite protests by Fells Pointers, the greater influence and wealth of the Baltimore group allowed them to introduce a charter and have it pass Maryland's legislature at Annapolis and to become law. And so in January the 1st of 1797, the City of Baltimore came to exist and the merchants, I might add, who were so successful in this charter that they go through, that the way that they established it, reduced Fells Point to practically being a medieval type vassal to the city because... and they did this by setting up two things. First is Fells Point having more working class people, more middle class and other you might say more non-wealthy people. They could control the vote by a stipulation that said that to vote in any kind of an important election, you had to have property valued at \$500 or more, or about in that range. Baltimore also controlled the Fells Point vote by having six political wards in Baltimore and just one in Fells Point. So whenever a city-wide issue came up, you had six times the power in Baltimore that you had in Fells Point. That's an interesting thing really because even today, there's this animosity of Fells Point towards the City of Baltimore. And one of the bases of it is that it's always been treated as sort of just another district or minor part of Baltimore without much political stature or power whatsoever, very little to get its way. And that existed down through the years.

So Fells Point continued as the center of shipping because the Inner Harbor or Basin as it was known there was very, very shallow and would only accommodate the small craft that brought the small cargoes of grain from the Eastern Shore and other parts of Maryland and Virginia. It would not handle any of the large vessels, which gave Fells Point complete control over the export/import, the

foreign commerce of the region. And you step back a moment and that really was what caused so much of the concern from the merchants, that they didn't have control over the area to which they were completely dependent upon before it became part of Baltimore. So that was the situation as of 1797, and it has remained that ever since.

Relatively speaking, though the growth in commerce in Baltimore/Fells Point was constant and upward throughout the 1780's, after the Revolution and up through the early 1790's. As soon as the British, or I should say, when the British, when England went to war again against the French - there had been a lapse between 1783 at the end of the American Revolution when the French fought alongside us until 1793 - and then the British declared war on the French again. From that time on, straight through to 1815, which would be the end of the War of 1812, there was war between France and England. Of course, when Napoleon took over in I think it was 1796, the war became much more intense throughout Europe.

[01:20:07:09]

But it was important to Fells Point because it also became ... because there was wide effects of the war in the West Indies. Basically, what had happened over the years was that the various European nations that owned the islands and possessions, and had their possessions, as they were called, in the West Indies, had developed these very fancy, or I shouldn't say fancy, but prosperous plantations for the production of sugar and coffee principally. They had been so successful that actually the islands produced very little except sugar and coffee. The labor, of course, throughout the West Indies at this time was slave labor. Haiti was the largest island, owned by France. There was a slave insurrection there in 1793 and 500,000 slaves rose up against the French nation. Of course the French, it was a very interesting situation because the French colonials were forced to flee Haiti, many of them, and many of them came to Baltimore. I think it was in 52 ships actually in 1793, which gave a very definite flavor of France to Baltimore. It wasn't the first injection of the French influence into Baltimore, actually, because the French armies had passed through Baltimore and a number of the merchants who came with the French army during the Revolution had stayed here. So anyway, because of the disruption of traffic between the West Indies and Europe...

[Kraig]

Were the Haitians successful against the French in overthrowing them?

[Geoffrey]

Eventually, yes.

[Kraig]

OK. So how many French died? Just a round number? This is for my own personal curiosity.

[Geoffrey]

I can't give you any casualties. I can say there was a lot of ... there was an insurrection...

[Kraig]

They were beaten back down again by the French? Did the French retake Haiti?

[Geoffrey]

Never. Haiti has been free ever since.

[Kraig]

Wow! OK, that's the answer to my question.

[Geoffrey]

But, it was a very rich island and because ...

[Kraig]

So many of those French West Indies and the British Virgin Islands ... I didn't know that Haiti struck their independence and kept it ever since. Wow - I never knew that.

[Geoffrey]

That's interesting... The problem was that the insurrection was so cruel and so complete that the whole island was burned up almost, devastated.

[Kraig]

Was Haiti just one big, like a lot of them, spice, where they were making all their money, too, so they really lost monetarily.

[Geoffrey]

Oh, it was a very prosperous island.

[Kraig]

So the French economically dropped because of that insurrection in Haiti.

[Geoffrey]

And the worst part of it was that Haiti 200 years later still hasn't, 210 years later, still hasn't recovered. In other words, it's still a poor island. Where it was in 1793 when it had the insurrection, it was a very rich island.

But from Fells Point's standpoint, all of these problems in the West Indies were tailor-made for prosperous activity here in Baltimore and Fells Point. And because the direct trade between the West Indies, because there was still a lot of trade, Haiti eventually fell off, but there was still a lot of islands producing a lot of coffee and a lot of sugar. Because of blockades and war at sea in the Mediterranean and in the North Sea off the French coast, trade between the islands and Europe was pretty much disrupted. So that was replaced by Americans. And though the various ports from New England all the way to Charleston participated in the West Indies trade, more and more at that time, it just happened that because Maryland and Virginia was the source of food, because not only had the war disrupted the trade with Europe, but also these islands whereas they were producing a tremendous amount of coffee and sugar, they weren't producing basic food products, so there was starvation on the islands. But this starvation could be handled principally by the flour and other products from Baltimore and the Chesapeake Bay. So, this put this region, more or less as far as

trading with the West Indies in the catbird seat. But because the trade had been the protected trade of both the British and the French, they of course were upset when it was replaced by American vessels.

[01:27:07:15]

This is an important point in the history of Fells Point because it was in 1793 that these small bay craft that had been hauling the grain say from the Chesapeake Bay up into the mills of Baltimore became larger and larger until they were 200 feet. And they now carried the flour from Fells Point down to the West Indies. They were very successful at that because they were fast and they could outrun just about any other vessel on the high seas, and particularly Naval vessels which are rather bulky and usually slower.

So this established the Chesapeake Bay schooner as the premium craft of its period. And it had a dual purpose, I mean it had a dual result. The primary result was that the sales of the flour were made by the merchants over in Baltimore and they prospered and they got richer and richer because on the return voyage [question about sound from outside] they brought the coffee and the sugar to Fells Point. Now, they could not take the coffee and sugar directly to Europe because it was a protected trade and their vessels would have been seized. So as sort of a subterfuge, they entered the coffee and the sugar into the Fells Point customs house where it became American coffee and American sugar. And then they turned around and put it in other ships and carried it to France or to the neutral countries such as Holland and Belgium and Russia, Sweden, Denmark, all of whom were made for coffee and sugar. Stimulated by the fact that it wasn't as readily available - nothing is in war-time - the prices kept going up.

So there was a tremendous amount of money made here in Baltimore, principally across Fallsway into Baltimore Town from this trade. And this we call the Golden Age of Fells Point - it could be called the Golden Age of Baltimore. And it's a very simple trade - you take flour down to the West Indies, which you could get almost any price for because the people were starving, and you brought back coffee and sugar and carried it to Europe, where you could get very high prices because people needed coffee and sugar.

So the port grew and the city grew very, very rapidly between 1792 and, oh I guess maybe 15 years later toward maybe lets say 1805 where the British and the French just got tired of losing their wealth to little Baltimore and little Fells Point. So they started taking, well they took a great number of ships wherever they could get them, not only the ones from Fells Point but also the ones from New England and Philadelphia, New York and everywhere else. However, if you examine the statistics of the number of ships taken, you can see that the number of ships taken from Fells Point, though they were a great number of them that went down there, the actual percentage of the vessels taken was very limited because of their speed.

So it's this schooner, this fabulous schooner that was called locally a pilot schooner because it had originally developed as a small craft as a pilot boat. And then that was then say 1740, 1750. Then when the grain trade developed into Baltimore, it became a slightly larger cargo vessel, maybe 44 feet overall in length. And even though it was no longer used as a pilot boat, it kept that name as a pilot boat schooner, and it was the principle craft on the Chesapeake Bay from ...

[Kraig]

What's the difference between the Baltimore Clipper ships and schooners?

[Geoffrey]

Well, the name pilot schooner is what the builders and everybody referred to them as here. The name Baltimore Clipper is a name that some journal or newspaper attached to them some time around 1830 or 1835. There's always a journalist out there who comes up with a slick name for a vessel or a cocktail or

[Kraig]

So a pilot schooner is the real name...

[Geoffrey]

That's the authentic name. But, when you're talking history you call them a pilot schooner but so the public knows what you are talking about, these big ones that I'm referring to now, these 110 and 125 foot ones that had a burden of 200 or 250 tons were the ones that were called Baltimore Clippers, starting after the War of 1812. They are also the ones that became the privateers and the blockade-runners during the War of 1812. But the French had give them that role actually, had bought a great number of them in Fells Point and where they were used not only to capture American and particularly, specifically Fells Point grain haulers, they were also used as privateers by the French against the British during that same period.

[End of tape/break - 01:35:12:10]

So as a result of this rapid rise in commerce out of Fells Point, and into Fells Point to the wars between France and England and Europe, Fells Point became a very, very important port at that time, of course part of Baltimore. It had established itself as one of the leading ship-building areas in the nation. So naturally when George Washington who was President decided to establish a Navy, one of the first vessels, one of the first ships build for the Navy, was built just east of here on the Patapsco. It was the USS Constellation. But not only was the Constellation build in Fells Point, through the years there were a whole group of sailing vessels built here for the Navy. A number of these pilot schooners or Baltimore clippers were adapted for Naval use and built in Fells Point - the Enterprise, the Experiment, the Nautilus, the Revenge and others. Then William Price, who was one of the principal builders, ship builders of Fells Point, whose house is directly across the street, at 910 Fells Street, built the Naval ship Hornet, which was a famous vessel here in Fells Point. In addition, Maryland supplied a large percentage, for one small state, of the personnel of the United States Navy. So this was very much of a maritime and after 1798, was very much of a Navy town. During the War of 1812, there were three large Navy ships built in Fells Point during that war. I mention that because most people think in terms of Fells Point as being a commercial area, but it was also a very important Navy town.

[01:38:36:26]

To go back to the Constellation, she fought her first battles against the French actually during this period of sort of no man's land type war that was going on in the West Indies. And later on, she had

various engagements, both in the Mediterranean and after the ... actually during the War of 1812, she was under blockade by the British, so she didn't see much action, though she did defend Norfolk during that war. But then she just served as one of many vessels throughout the first half of the 19th century.

We should pay some attention to the Constellation beyond her origins here in Fells Point because she had a very, very long service. During the Civil War, she didn't do very much, but she was overseas in the Mediterranean once again. But, the vessel that is still tied up in Baltimore Harbor, in Baltimore's Inner Harbor, is the USS Constellation. Over the last years, there's been a great controversy as to whether or not she is the original ship, much modified, or whether or not she was built new in 1854. After a very extensive investigation, which was very much of an investigation rather than just really writing a book, I concluded that the vessel in Baltimore Harbor is the original Constellation, built and launched in Fells Point in 1797, rebuilt several times, and then extensively rebuilt in 1854, given modern rifle-type guns and recommissioned once again. So, my conclusion is that the vessel that you see there is the oldest US Navy vessel still surviving. Her sister ship, the USS Constitution, is tied up in Boston. And she is still owned by the Navy. The Constellation here in Baltimore is deeded to City of Baltimore and therefore decommissioned. So the Navy is very proud of their Constitution, so they have created a public relations war over the last 50 years, which might seem strange to people that don't know the mind of the military. But I think, with this investigation that I've completed recently, we've straightened it out fairly well. Which is not to say everybody's accepted it yet, because you're dealing with emotions here as much as facts. Hopefully, facts on my part, but emotions on other people's part. So, that's the story of the Constellation. And it makes her very, very sentimental as far as Fells Point is concerned...

[Kraig]

I was going to ask you, what's the Navy, you mentioned the military thought, what's the Navy mad about?

[Geoffrey]

They really don't want ... but now that they've given her away to Baltimore, it would be extremely embarrassing to have to say they gave away the oldest ship in Baltimore - that basically is one problem. The second problem is, and these are the minds of children, these are not intellectuals talking now, you know - the other big problem is, they really just don't want any competition for the USS Constitution. She wants to be the glory, the traditional vessel of this period, of this early period. And to have Constellation down here is a deterrent. There have been two or three bills actually in Congress over the last 50 years to destroy Constellation. The Congress has never passed any of them. And now that she received such an extensive repair and refurbishing in 1999, the chances are they won't try to destroy her any more again. But, it's really a very strange story because it is so ridiculous. Had I known when I wrote this book about the Constellation that there was going to be such a harassing reaction to it, if that's a word, I would never have written it. Because, it's just not that important. But, once it's out there, you gotta defend it, and so it takes a great deal of time to do that.

[01:45:20:15]

But, anyway to move on from the Navy to Fells Point, the Navy only had about 20 vessels, I guess, during the War of 1812. And the British had maybe all-together, certainly not in the north, not off the North American coast, had about 400 major vessels, so it fell upon the American privateers to do a great deal of the harassing of the British. And of course, you know the British Empire has always depended upon trade for its lifeline, for its blood, for its specie. And, so these lines of trade were open and available. And so American privateers during the war, during the War of 1812, were very, very aggressive. The most successful ones were the ones out of Fells Point because they were these schooners...

[This paragraph cut from DVD.] And you must get some pictures of them, by the way. There are some beautiful models in the new Maritime Museum. But there are also some paintings up on the walls, though they're not the original ones there. The Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England and also the Maryland Historical Society, has a number of paintings of these schooners that I'm talking about. You can also check this book about the pilot schooner, which libraries have. Ellen has copies of it up there and get an idea of the pictures that you might want to include. Because this has literally dozens of them in it. These are all black and white of course because the publisher didn't want to take the expense to use color.

But they are beautiful craft. And, as I said, during the War of 1812, just to give you an idea, there were only 55 of these privateers out of Baltimore, or out of Fells Point / Baltimore / Fells Point, there were a total of 1500 of them that were commissioned out of the United States altogether during the war. But those 55 out of Fells Point, these marvelous schooners, captured, burned or sank 47% of the total number, which was about 1500 that were captured. And this is a rough estimate because they didn't really have ways of analyzing or getting statistics at that time. So, I think that would break down to the fact that you had 55 out of 1500 caught or burned or captured 47% of the total number that were taken. So, this was the great hurrah of the pilot schooner.

And after the war, because they had become so sharp as they say, so sleek, so inefficient as far as hauling cargos, large cargos, that they fell into disuse for most trades. But on the other hand, two other trades developed after the War of 1812. And one of them was the illicit slave trade in Africa, which the schooners were used very, very successfully, not necessarily built in Fells Point, as a matter of fact, built at this time all over the world because there were models and drawings of them were available. And then, they were used widely in the opium trade between India and China. And that trade started in the early 1820's and continued right on until about 1860 probably. So, you had a great number of them used by the French, by the British, by the Dutch, in and by Bostonians, particularly the proper ones. Most of your famous families of Boston, not most of them but several, like the Nye family, the Cushings, the Forbes, and I can't think of any others at the moment, made their fortunes by selling opium to the Chinese. And, of course, most of your younger merchants, or not most, but a number in Baltimore after the War of 1812 when they had all these ships not being used went into the slave trade which was, at that time, punishable by death. But, slavery was very much a part of America in the 1820's and, even though we had laws that forbade the introduction of slaves into America from Africa after 1820, and added that if you were caught, you were punishable by death, the trade continued to flourish very much.

[Kraig]

Explain what's meant by a privateer.

[Geoffrey]

A privateer is a privately owned vessel which is commissioned, is granted a commission by the US government only - it can't be a state, it can't be a city - as the United States government, through the US State Department grants a Letter of Marque commission, and that Letter of Marque commission allows them to arm, that is to carry canon, and to seek out and capture the enemy's vessels. And a great many of them did that, about 1500 that I mentioned earlier. A great many of them were just satisfied to be armed and to be blockade runners, in other words, they would take a cargo from the United States to France and didn't necessarily try to capture enemy craft, British craft in doing so. Privateering was a very, very old method of supplementing your military. The last war in this country that we used was the Civil War. And of course, the Ann McKim, Alabama and Sumter were Letter of Marque vessels. And the Confederates particularly commissioned a lot of vessels to be privateers. And then by international treaty it came to an end around the middle of the nineteenth century.

So, that touches on the maritime aspect of Fells Point which, of course, became the center of privateering without discussing the military end of it, particularly the Battle of Baltimore which, I'm sure, PJ can cover pretty well. I might add that the reason, or certainly an important reason, that the British attacked Baltimore was that they referred to Fells Point as a den of thieves or the den of pirates because of the success of its privateers during the War of 1812.

[01:54:44:14]

[Jacquie]

If you could tell us the story of Alex Brown and Brown's Wharf that Ellen says you knew.

[Geoffrey]

I'm not sure what she's referring to.

[Jacquie]

Well, apparently Alex Brown was not your most wonderful ethical civil servant....

[Geoffrey]

It takes a while before anyone becomes a human being. They've got to be rich and fat and successful first. Did you know that? A lean, hungry man is not a good citizen.

[Jacquie]

Just quickly. You don't have to spend a lot of time on it.

[Geoffrey]

I'm trying to collect my thoughts.

[Jacquie]

He was a trader, right, and he built...

[Geoffrey]

The so-called attribute that, for instance, our buddy Bush talks about all the time is patriotism. Patriotism was not a front and center sort of condition in the 19th century. People protected their homes. People were forced to go fight for their country. Going into battle you may have gotten a good shot of whiskey or rum and a fevered speech to do it for God and country, but the idea of Patriotism as a way of life or as an important attribute of everyone's life, I think is more of a 20th century development. And I think that, without getting into politics today you can see how destructive it can be if you use it as a weapon, which our current President is doing.

But, to take that point and go back to Alexander Brown, during this war that we were just talking about, the War of 1812, the Duke of Wellington's army was fighting the War of the Peninsula, which was in Portugal and Spain. They didn't have sufficient food supplies, so they needed this same Maryland/Virginia grain that we are talking about. So the Duke instructed the Royal Navy to issue licenses to certain individuals to give them free passage because every American ship, of course, was subject to capture. Once the war, the War of 1812 started in June of 1812 and Mr. Alex Brown and a number of other people, a number of other merchants all over the country got these licenses and they would, you know, load a cargo of grain and, if they got stopped by the Royal Navy en route to a Spanish port, they could pass freely. Well, not so much of what we would term patriotism, but because there were a great many Americans that still hated the British, not only for the revolution but for dozens of other reasons... For instance, most American seamen hated the British because the British would stop American ships and just lift a handful of sailors off the ships. This is going back to 1800. It's called impressment. And it was kidnapping. And so the British were hated in Fells Point. So naturally when mariners like Joshua Barney, who was a famous Fells Point hero of the Revolution and then later on in the War of 1812, when he would come across an American ship that had a license, you know, he would just bring it in as a traitor. It wasn't an American license, it was a license granted by the Royal Navy. So you'd bring the ship in as a prize, even though it could have been right out of Fells Point. So, Alexander Brown participated in that trade a great deal.

The other thing that Brown, as well as a great number of other merchants, participated in, and the question is - was it good or evil - is the immigrant trade, of course. Immigration of course started with the very first white man that got to America. After the War of 1812, immigration became a big industry. Where we tend to now to give it a sort of aura of emotion or sentimentality, actually the owners of vessels considered immigration cargo, immigrants as cargo. So the trade was a very harsh business where an Alexander Brown ship could take let's say tobacco or some other product to England, as an example, to Liverpool, and in Liverpool he had one of his sons there and his son would have agents in Germany and they would corral a cargo of people and they'd transfer them up to Liverpool. And not by coercion so much as by PR and other tactics, these people would immigrate, they'd become immigrants. More often than not, they didn't have any money, so the big deal was that the ship owner would say you can pay on the other side. Well that meant that they had to serve out a sort of period as slaves. It was called indentured servants or indentured ... and what it meant was that you got the free ride over but you were forced to ... or you were auctioned, actually. The white people, black, whatever they were, were auctioned on arrival at Fells Point. And

so if Jacquie was in the crowd bidding on a nice, robust white man, she would get him for four years, and some up as long as seven years, and then they would get their freedom. It was uncontrolled for years. But in the early years of our country, and our state, it was a terrible, terrible business without any controls whatsoever.

One particularly interesting early law was, and this happened any number of times, that if a young, bright, let's say Irish girl, 18, 19, wanted to come to America, they were corralled together at Liverpool and she would, you know, get the deal well you'll have to serve when you get there, and so there was a little twist to it that often the owners owned, the Marylanders or wherever they were, Baltimoreans or ... this particularly happened often in the country, the young Irish girl would be thrown in with the slaves. And with nature taking its course, there would be offspring. And Maryland law was that the offspring, as well as the white girl, as well as the husband, were slaves forever. Very kind, gentle treatment.

And there were many, many other harsh treatments. Another was that if a family was on an Alexander Brown ship or any other ship in the slave trade, I mean the immigrant business, if the breadwinner died on the way over, and the death rate was very high because, you know, they fed them dishwater and they had insufficient blankets, and disease was wild and everything, but if the breadwinner died on the way over, the wife and the children had to pay his fare. So that meant that his term was added to their term. And then, of course, the children and the mother could probably, often were, broken up and sold separately.

This was particularly harsh all over the United States, not just Fells Point, during the post ... as I say there were no rules at all while we were a colony of Britain, but then after we became a nation, due to the political power of the immigrants themselves ... Like the Germans had their German societies and the Irish got their Irish societies and the Polish had their Polish societies once they got here... Gradually you got some reforms and some legislation came very, very slowly. And it wasn't until the 1880's that the Contracts Labor Redemption law was passed, making it illegal ...

And, down here at Fells Point, of course, a lot of these women couldn't pay off, who came from broken families, husbands dead and the women and their children would be thrown into a barge on the waterfront here where they were incarcerated until such a time as they died or as somebody bought up their contract.

Fortunately, the Catholic Church became quite powerful in Fells Point and there were specifically two or three priests who really brought about a lot of reform in the immigration trade here in Fells Point and built such things as orphans homes and agitated for reform. Baltimore was the center, was the first diocese in America, so it had special strengths and power. And so there were far more Catholic priests, there weren't very many but there were far more in the Baltimore region than there were anywhere else.