

For Point, Harrowing Night Before Dawn's Early Light

The Town Criers, The Rev. Jack Trautwein and oboist Michael Lisicky, have offered News of the Day in the Square daily for the last month, corresponding to what arrived on those dates in 1814. Said "P.J." Trautwein, the researcher and writer, "This of course was a critical time in the history of Baltimore, Fell's Point, and the United States. Much of the news presented comes directly from the newspapers of the day. Although most of the local newspapers did not publish on Sept. 14, because of the British invasion, the following is the news which would have been circulating in Fell's Point on that day:

Throughout yesterday, heavy rains and thunderstorms covered the region. During the afternoon, the enemy was constantly testing our line of defense along Hampstead Hill. Their troop movements were always countered by our forces along the entrenchments and redoubts. One observer told me that it looked like a chess match. It has been reported that the British sent troops as far north and west as Belair Road and the Herring Run just east of Major General Sam Smith's estate, Montebello.

During the night many were able to observe the enemy campfires along the ridge less than two miles from here. With the rumor circulating that the British would make an assault with bayonets during the night, our citizens, spent a night full of fear.

Across the river the British bomb and rocket ships continued their assault on Fort McHenry. Between 9 and 1, the bombardment diminished. Rumors circulated that the enemy had (Continued)

Norrises Given 9/11 Award

Laura and Tony Norris, whose world famous Bertha's bar and restaurant has watched over Broadway Square for four decades, were celebrated on that Square Sept. 11 as winners of the 9/11 Selfless Community Service Award. Assistant Towne Crier Michael Lisicky tolled his bell, read the decree and presented the couple with a plaque. This was the 11th presentation of the award, conceived by the Point's senior town crier, the Rev. Jack Trautwein, to reassert community values following the 9/11/01 assault on them.

One of several nominating letters from past awardees said, "Tony and Laura Norris have given this community its most famous eatery and most accessible meeting venue: Bertha's--which, like the Norrises, is on the Square. The Residents' Association meets there monthly. Ever generous in their support of civic causes, the Norrises also provide guitar and mandolin impromptu upstairs during the annual inclusion of their classic Ann Street home in the Preservation Society Historic House Tours.

"The couple came to Fell's Point from Washington 41 years ago in the midst of the Road Fight, established the restaurant and, with Tony's steamed-up slogan, "Eat Bertha's Mussels," pulled the world to lower Broadway. It is the recurrent venue when the community needs to gather--witness the post-wake lifting of cups and mussels for Bob Keith [another honoree] three years ago. He has also served on the board of the Preservation Society and they both supported the revival of Thames Street Park. Through the Point's repeated travails, the two have offered--when asked--the good counsel that accompanies a certain age, with or without mussels."

Last year's honoree was preservationist, bar chronicler and puppeteer Mark Walker.

BRICK BANTER



CAVACOS

Brighter Street Lights--Pt. II

By David Speer

Landscape architect and 4-year resident

One tool that urban designers commonly employ to strengthen the historic character of a neighborhood is to install quaint, historic-looking street lights. Fell's Point has many such black coach lamps. Hundreds actually. But these lamps, at 12 to 16 feet, are too short to cast enough light for safe illumination in a high-use urban environment. They are energy wasting, expensive, and visually a mistake here. Standing at the foot of Broadway, I counted 34 such lights down the brick pier. I envisioned the scene without the massive clutter and I'm positive this water vista would be cleaner and more dignified if only 3 or 4 taller, modern street lights replaced all these faux-historic coach lamps. I suggest the street scene throughout Fell's Point would be greatly improved by removing all these coach lamps, and the city would save significant money by installing fewer, taller, energy-efficient, modern street lights in their place.

Editor's Note: The coach lamps also show a proclivity to collapse in a strong wind. One fragility theory--dog urine corrodes the anchor bolts.

Many years ago engineers installed much taller and brighter, brown square steel poles with shoebox-type street lights around Fell's Point. These still exist and they sometimes alternate with the shorter black historic lamps, as on Thames St. These "modern" lights are 30-year-old models at the end of their life span, not energy-efficient like the new ones. I find the mix of short decorative coach lamps and taller modern shoeboxes a poor solution, probably installed in different decades. There are only a few examples of urban design where historic lamps work well, and are a part of the authentic street scene--the Gaslamp district of San Diego, or along narrow streets in Paris. But so often, limited municipal budgets will only allow inexpensive knock-off lamps, such as exist throughout Fell's Point.

These are inefficient, because the reflectors do not cast light effectively. They are too short to illuminate large urban areas or wide streets, such as Thames, and engineers must install four times as many lamps to compensate. This over-supply crushes the city budget for procurement, and continues to cost into the future with high electricity bills. I believe someone must make a courageous decision, declare them a mistake and (Continued)

Happenings

Chrome Concerns Residents

The Residents' Association, meeting upstairs at Bertha's on Sept. 3, resumed heated discussion of whether residue chromium--capped to allow construction of Harbor Point--could be a threat to residents' health. Most of the half dozen speaking at length asserted no-confidence in the developer, Michael Beatty, or federal, state, and city remediation assurances. Black Olive restaurateur and innkeeper Stelios Spiliadis called for a drive matching the 1960s defeat of a federal highway project here, saying he feared for the health of his many customers visiting for medical treatment at Johns Hopkins. He invited active opponents of Harbor Point to a brain-storming lunch at his Olive Room on Caroline St. for lunch on Sept. 7 and about 20 attended, including his wife, son and two staff members.

Short- and long-term Pointers alike expressed fear that the cap could fail under stress of construction. Spiliadis answered a contention that the project approval process is virtually complete by saying it should be fought in the courts and media. The group agreed on the need to organize and he later circulated its tentative name: BREAD--Baltimore Residents for Environmentally Appropriate Development.

Shakespearean Billings Dies

Clyde Carson Billings, better known as Bud to friends and neighbors along Shakespeare St., died on July 14. From Youngstown, he was a 30-year resident here and known as an affable handyman, willing to take on even the contentious issue of parking permits. He came when the state hired him as construction engineer for a weatherizing program for city row houses. Few knew Bud attended Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Bowling Green State University as a chaplain, earned two masters and a Rutgers doctorate. Bud had a deep appreciation for history of Fell's Point and the Chesapeake Bay region. He returned to Ohio in 2007 to be near family. --Anon

Benches Beset Main Street

About 70 Main Streeters and guests met at The Admiral Fell Inn July 30 for the business-oriented association's summer general meeting, focused on commercial code enforcement, vagrancy/homeless issues and policing. Councilman Jim Kraft lauded the group for adding clean-up crews to the historic district--paid through the merchants' Gold Medalion fees. Drawing the most animated discussion, though, were calls from long-standing businessmen on the Squares for removal of its benches.

The city code commissioner, Eric Booker, said his 120 inspectors are taking up proactive pursuit of commercial violations--from broken windows and shabby paint to prolonged vacancy and signage issues--rather than waiting for complaints as in recent years. He said the first round would result in warnings, but the second in fines. His deputy, Norris Turnipseed, said the Eastern Ave. corridor would be a prime focus, adding that in a recent survey he found it already "looking pretty good."

Kraft reported on a meeting the prior evening at the Polish Home to consider carving a second Main Street out of the current one, for the Broadway corridor north of Fleet St. to Fayette St. Business owners and residents in that Latin-oriented area reportedly lambasted city officials attending for failings from security to trash removal. The

FPCO Vs. Bar Proliferation

Community Organization President Joanne Masapust addressed two related liquor issues at an Aug. 13 meeting at EBLO: should FPCO pursue a cutoff of bar license transfers into this neighborhood, and should it oppose transfer of a dormant bar-package goods license at burned-out 1709 Fleet St. to the current site of Another Period in Time antique shop across the street? Debate among the 35 attendees was animated on the first count and passionate on the second.

Masapust came armed with a survey counting 76 liquor establishments, including 8 not currently operational, in the area bounded by Caroline, Eastern and Washington Sts. and by the harbor to the south. A majority opposed any new transfers here of licenses from elsewhere in this southeast 46th District, as currently permitted by state liquor laws. She said FPCO will press for revision of that authority through the Task Force of 'Point community groups, chaired by Del. Pete Hammen.

The Fleet St. transfer debate opened with a presentation by the operator for seven years of Fell's Point Liquors and Bar, Raj Bommakanti. He offered elaborate plans for expanded new digs in two buildings he would buy across the street. Several residents denounced this a shady operation, suspected of after-hours sales and a hangout for drunks. Masapust offered Liquor Board' figures showing the site has generated 96 complaint calls to 911 during Raj's 7 years and 24 police reports, 12 involving common assaults.

Still, Masapust said the Liquor Board was unlikely to oppose the transfer and FPCO's goal should be negotiation of a binding, restrictive memorandum of understanding--which Raj said he is willing to accept and the Board has encouraged in recent conflicts. A motion to that effect carried.

FunFest Volunteers

The 47th Funfest weekend is Oct. 4-7 and its new management, Main Street under President Mike Maraziti, is calling for volunteers to help bring a renewed local content to the fund-raiser for the Preservation Society and for Main Street. There are multiple ways to participate, starting with fellspointfest.com, then click on Get Involved, or email Volunteers@fellspointfest.com. Main Street also needs a volunteer for its Farmers' Market on Saturday mornings in the Square.

city's Development Corp. has encouraged creation of neighborhood Main Streets, making limited funds available for staff, to supplement the city's depleted services.

On the mentally ill/homeless, Pamela Hardy of the Bon Secours Health System described its program, financed by a HUD grant, to move them into housing and treatment. She encouraged calling the police to remove disruptive vagrants to the program. Then the discussion expanded to include drunks and panhandlers. Police Capt. Brian Hance, new to Southeast, described officers' difficulties in making such arrests but said more than 50 citations were handed out in the last year and he was seeking a larger presence on the streets.

Nick Filipidis of Jimmy's described bedlam on the Square at 4AM and called for removal of the benches. He was seconded by Mike Beckner of BOP's Pizza. The woman who manages one of Main Street's most acclaimed projects, the Saturday Farmers' Market, said it is at risk to close because of early-hour vagrant incursions. Main Street President Mike Maraziti of One-Eyed Mike's tavern talked of an initiative with the police to reestablish a holding tank for drunks. He also defended an impending city remake of the Square, which does not do away with benches. "The plan is solid," he said, and work will begin when the construction will be least disruptive. That is still in debate.

Harrowing Night - cont. from front

taken the fort. After 1 o'clock the barrage and fire became extremely intense. The canon blasts seemed to be from directly across the river, as well as down stream. The noise was horrifying. A dispatch during the night from Lazaretto Point brought news that through the rain they had spotted about 11 small attack boats making their way toward the harbor. Before any shots were fired they withdrew and disappeared in the rain and darkness.

In the morning hours an observer from around Fort Babcock and Fort Covington of the Ferry Branch brought word that about 2 o'clock, 9 or 10 enemy vessels, one being a rocket ship, evidently slipped by Fort McHenry on the Ferry Branch. They were finally sighted in the waters between Fort Babcock and Fort Covington. This observer said he had heard that Sailing Master John Webster of Fort Babcock made the discovery. Almost simultaneously the two batteries and the enemy boats began firing. This triggered a response from guns at Fort McHenry, Lazaretto Point and ships in the harbor. This was the frightening noise we experienced in the middle of the night.

During the night, to the east, our troops remained steadfast even in the water-soaked entrenchments. I am elated to report that at daybreak we discovered that the British had not only retreated from their bombardment by sea but also the enemy troops east of here are retreating. They appear to be headed back to North Point. Gen. Smith has issued a statement warning the military and citizens to keep vigilant for British deserters and said they felt the enemy was just regrouping for a second attack. He instructed that work continue on fortifications.

More regiments have arrived this morning and are being assigned stations. We have again been warned of another possible attack, so we must remain vigilant. The Committee of Vigilance and Safety has rescinded the blackout for tonight.

This ends the news for the 14th day of September, 1814.

Brighter Street Lights - cont. from front

write them off to a failed attempt to make an historic district seem more historic. Simple high-tech street lights in historic districts look fine.

Redesign of Thames Street and sidewalks near the Broadway Pier could be the testing ground for efficient, modern street lights only, and see if our historic neighborhood can stand on its own.

Good Neighbors Water Trees

A staunch defender of trees, who asks to be unbylined, is calling on neighbors to adopt street trees parched by summer heat. She makes these life-saving points from a joint publication of the Forest Service, Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources; and City Forestry Division:

- A single healthy tree can have the cooling effect of 5 room air conditioners running 20 hours a day, saving energy and money.
- Trees reduce noise pollution, absorb air pollution, release oxygen, buffer damaging winds and purify groundwater.
- Trees add value and curb appeal. As part of our urban forest, street trees belong to everyone and it only makes sense for everyone to help them thrive.
- Water trees often, especially in summer. Break up hard-packed soil, remove weeds or vines and add mulch. Add a little fence to discourage dog urination, which is deadly to trees.

Schedules

Trash and Recycling

Current days for trash pickup are Tuesdays and for recycling are Thursdays. Residents are limited to setting out three 32-gallon cans of waste between 6PM on Mondays and 6AM on Tuesdays.

Neighborhood Meetings

Douglass Place: Third Tuesday of each month at Bertha's, dlh411@gmail.com.

Antique Dealers' Association: Call 410.675.4776.

Community Organization: Second Tuesdays at 606 South Ann St., 443.791.1717.

Main Street: info@fellspointmain-street.org or 410.675.8900.

Preservation Society: 410.675.6750 ext.16 or preservationsociety.com.

Residents' Association: First Wednesdays, 7PM, Bertha's.

thanks!

The all-voluntary Fell's Pointer thanks its four sustaining sponsors, One-Eyed Mike's Tavern, 708 S. Bond St., 410.327.0445; Duda's Tavern, Thames and Bond Sts., 410.276.9719; Howie B Properties, commercial and residential real estate in Fell's Point and throughout Baltimore, 410.375.4200; and Jimmy's Restaurant, 801 S. Broadway, 410.327.3273.

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PRINTER AD

The *Fell's Pointer* is published monthly by volunteers of Fell's Point Citizens on Patrol, Inc. Questions, input and participation in patrols and this newsletter are welcome. E-mail info@fpcop.com. Online www.fpcop.com. Write P.O. Box 6137, Baltimore, MD 21231.