

BALTIMORE

CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Society Focuses on Peale With a Sense of Mission

By Robert B. Kershaw
President of BCHS

The fifth Annual Meeting of the Baltimore City Historical Society was held on June 4 at Preservation Maryland's downtown headquarters in The Old St. Paul's Rectory. We are grateful to Executive Director Tyler Gearhart for extending warm hospitality to the Society.

Preservation Maryland restored the Rectory to a museum-house quality in 1989 and now occupies the building as its architectural face to the state preservation community under a long-term lease from Old St. Paul's Church. The group has emerged as a powerful and widely respected statewide advocate for architectural preservation. Its important work – both as lobbyist before state and local governments and as grant maker and lender in the field – is supported by a well-managed endowment that has grown to nearly \$10 million in the last 20 years.

This example is one our Society should study closely and emulate where possible as we develop plans for adaptive re-use of what is to be the Peale Museum History Center and provide for its professional staffing and financial needs. Fortunately, we are not required to reinvent the wheel – but rather to follow the path of our predecessors in related thriving organizations such as Preservation Maryland.

Storied Past Underpins Upbeat City College Present

By Lewis H. Diuguid
Class of 1953

The nation's third oldest, the city's grandest—this can only be that superlative castle of Gothic stone high on a windy hill, Baltimore City College, the public high school that for most of the last 166 years has made its case as a special place. Two years ago, on the 75th anniversary of the current building at The Alameda and 33rd Street, City became a National Historic Landmark.

This brief history of the school is drawn from the extensive documentation prepared on the initiative of Neal R. Bernstein and the Alumni Association, of



Photo by John C. Byrnes

Former President Somerville and new President Kershaw at Old St. Paul's Rectory.

With the benefit of Judge John Carroll Byrnes' creative vision in founding BCHS and continued wisdom as its chairman, and Romaine Somerville's excellent leadership as president for the last two years, I assumed the role of president on June 4 confident that we are poised to make some large and exciting steps. We will continue to offer excellent programs on Baltimore City history – such as the Baltimore Historians' Workshop, organized by Professor Garrett Power at the University of Maryland School of Law and attended by more than 70 scholars in May. Another was the Annual Meeting's behind-the-scenes tour of the historic Clarence M. Mitchell Jr. Courthouse.

The History Honorees selected by our Historians Council under Professor Cynthia Neverdon-Morton and approved by our Trustees, along (Cont. on Page 2)

which he is past president, for submittal to the National Park Service in pursuit of the landmark status. That report relied heavily on two books written for City's 100th and 150th anniversaries.

The founding of what initially was called simply The High School came in 1828, eight years after Baltimore's first elementary schools opened and one year after Philadelphia's initial high school. Boston's English High School dates to 1821. The High School was in a rented building where Preston Gardens is today along St. Paul St. Several moves followed as the all-male student body grew. When Eastern and Western (Cont. on Page 3)

Fifth Mayor's Reception in New Museum Sept. 18

The Baltimore City Historical Society's annual reception and brunch will be held on Sunday, September 18, at noon in the new Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture on Pratt and President Streets. Members and guests are invited to salute eight honorees in history, hear the co-author of a recent book on *African American Leaders of Maryland*, and tour the \$34 million building with one of its architects.

Tickets cost \$35, \$60 for couples, and proceeds benefit the Peale Resurrection Fund to finance the Society's revival of the shuttered Peale Museum as the Baltimore History Center. Discount parking is available at PMI, 815 E. Pratt Street.

Living honorees at this fifth reception and brunch, as reported by the chair of the History Honors Committee, Prof. Cynthia Neverdone-Morton, include:

Dr. Stanley F. Battle, president of Coppin State University and editor of *The State of Black Baltimore*.

Scott S. Sheads, National Parks Service historian at Fort McHenry and author of *Rockets' Red Glare: The Maritime Defense of Baltimore in 1814*.

Charles B. Duff, ex-president of the Baltimore Architecture Foundation, president of Jubilee Baltimore Inc. and "mayor of Mid-Town."

Julian L. Lapidis, represented the city in the General Assembly for 32 years and is president of the Baltimore Heritage.

Frank Robinson, led the Orioles to two World Series titles, later managed the team, and entered the Hall of Fame as an Oriole.

Dr. Suzanne E. Chapelle will be available to sign copies of her "potrait gallery."

Guiding the museum tour is architect Gary A. Bowden of RTKL Associates of Baltimore. He teamed with Philip Freelon of the Freelon Group of Durham, N.C. to become "the first African-Americans to design a major building in downtown Baltimore," noted Sun architecture critic Edward Gunts. "They're also the sort of achievers that the museum was created to spotlight."

EDITORIAL: *History's A Noble But Moving Target*

History is very tricky. Its substance depends upon *who* is telling the story, *how* they are telling it, and *why*.

We saw this tricky business of history demonstrated in the 1990s when the National Endowment for the Humanities and Professor Theodore Rabb led an effort to draft so-called standards for the teaching of American history. The attempt failed, because of the diversity of Americans who want to tell their story—from Native Americans to descendants of colonial settlers and slaves, to the current infusion of immigrants from around the world. The diversity of competing cultures and viewpoints could find no consensus in the quest for center stage to tell American history. Competing political, philosophical and religious agendas prevented accord on why various stories should be told, when and to whom.

At the end of the day, the history community—academy and lay—abandoned the search for American history standards. With that, the larger national education community has diminished the study of history. “No Child Left Behind” national legislation emphasizes the less controversial disciplines of literacy and mathematics. With respect to our history, it is as if we decided, “If we can’t agree on something nice to say, better to say nothing at all.”

Social studies have largely disappeared from public education. The ignorance of historic facts is the butt of late night talk show jokes. Should we care? The value of history is deeply appreciated by BCHS members—a choir that does not need that sermon. What is worth repeating, and celebrating, is the Society’s openness to *ALL* of Baltimore’s citizens to both tell and hear their history. At its finest, history is the great human story without barriers, and that is the goal of this Society.

President’s Vision

(Continued from Page 1)

with the newly instituted Arnold Prize for Baltimore history scholarship funded by the Martel family, are important BCHS institutions. Eddie Leon is our dependable program publisher and Donald Torres is modernizing our membership database. Many other directors, members of the President’s Advisory Council, Trustees, officers and countless volunteers have worked hard to advance BCHS in its five-year infancy.

With our recent successful matching of the \$20,000 Heritage Area Grant for planning reuse of the Peale Museum, BCHS is poised to secure a world-class physical home and to ensure stable funding for preserving and celebrating Baltimore’s diverse, dynamic and fascinating history. We live in great and challenging times that will be well remembered if we seize our opportunities. BCHS has an abundance of those, with your support and involvement!

BCHS Chairman and Judge John M. Byrnes offered members this introduction to the Society’s new leader:

President Kershaw comes to the office well groomed for it. He is a graduate of McDonogh School, Princeton University (cum laude, 1974) and the University of Maryland School of Law. He is a well-respected civil litigator and an advocate of high professional standards, including pro bono responsibilities, which he not only preaches, but lives. A lecturer and writer, he recently presented a well received paper on the Peale Municipal Museum Building, the restoration of which he intends to champion as president.

Kershaw is a past president of the Bar Association of Baltimore City and the Baltimore Bar Foundation. He is president-elect of the Baltimore Courthouse & Law Museum Foundation and was president of the Maryland Humanities Council and Preservation Maryland, Inc. He has served repeatedly as Senior Warden of Emanuel Episcopal Church. As a resident of Bolton Hill, he “curates” his own modest, but well-regarded collection of Baltimore neo-classical furniture and decorative arts. Despite the heavy obligations of his civic and professional lives, he ekes out some recreation time, particularly enjoying international travel, skiing and fly-fishing.

The Society is fortunate to have someone of Bob’s caliber, experience and dedication to Baltimore history.

Matching Grants Put Funds in Till for Peale

By Romaine Somerville

Immediate Past BCHS President

Members of the Joint Committee for the Peale Museum are proud to announce that they have raised the matching funds required for the \$20,000 planning grant that the Baltimore City Historical Society received from the Baltimore City Heritage Area Program. The total of \$40,300 now in hand will be used to prepare a feasibility study and architectural drawings as the first step toward reopening the Peale as the Baltimore History Center.

A special thanks for their generous financial support is extended to Constellation Energy, the France-Merrick Foundation, the William Donald Schaefer Civic Fund and members of the boards of BCHS, Baltimore Heritage Inc. and the Baltimore Architecture Foundation. Among the historic attributes of the 1813 Peale is its having been lit by gas, an innovation that led in three years to founding of the Baltimore Gas Lighting Company that is a predecessor of Constellation.

In addition, the City of Baltimore has placed \$150,000 in the budget of the Department of Planning to be used for emergency repairs to the Peale building, which has been vacant for 10 years.

The planning process is well underway. Committee members recently met with representatives of the Departments of Planning and Public Works as well as the Downtown Partnership and the Baltimore Heritage Area Program. The focus of the meeting was to outline a program for the expenditure of the \$150,000 in City funds. It was determined that these funds will be used to restore the exterior woodwork—windows, frames, architectural detail—and to restore masonry. In addition, the first floor will be made accessible to the disabled. These efforts are to begin this fall.

Newsletter Still Nameless

Inexplicably, despite the proffered grand prize of a crab feast with Chairman John C. Byrnes, the BCHS Newsletter’s readership has failed to take up our challenge to provide a proper name for this semi-annual journal.

Please, scratch the judge’s itch. Put your inspired answer in the membership renewal form on Page 4. Attach a sketch if your imagined masthead suggests it.

City's Keystone is Alumni

(Continued from Page 1)

female high schools opened in 1844, the eventual City became Male High School and in 1850 Central High—then Baltimore City College when it briefly converted to a five-year school. The name stuck, con-founding the orderly minded ever since.

In 1875, academically focused City moved into its own building, at Howard and Center Streets. Ten years later, Balti-more opened the mechanically inclined predecessor to Baltimore Polytechnic In-stitute—starting a rivalry that endures— and Colored High School, later Douglass, for the segregated blacks. The B&O Railroad's Howard Street Tunnel bur-rowed under City in 1892, weakening the building and prompting its demolition.

A replacement went up on the same site in 1899. It is still there, now apart-ments, and it also is on the National Reg-



Photo courtesy of Baltimore City College

ister of Historic Places. By the 1920s, BCC had outgrown that building. Under pres-sure from alumni, the prospering city built, at unprecedented cost, a “Castle on the Hill” for 2,500 students in 1928. And such a building. Entering freshmen could be for-given for wondering if they had arrived four years early at Princeton, the inspira-tion of the design.

As imposing as is the whole, the dev-ilment is in the details. The submittal to the Park Service notes that on a large

Gothic arch “are decorative carvings de-picting the faces of Riggin Buckler and G. Corner Fenhagen,” the architects—the latter an alumnus.

For the next two decades, City had all of the answers. But the Supreme Court's 1954 decision ending segregation of schools, and the related exodus to the suburbs of the school's traditional popu-lace began to raise more complex issues. Enrollments tell some of the story. In 1937, a high of 3,215 attended, usually break-ing down as 45% Protestant, 35% Jewish and 20% Catholic. By 1959, 59% were going on to college.

Immediately after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, small numbers of blacks entered without incident. Within 10 years, half of the student body—by then 4,000, in double shifts—were blacks. New high schools in the northern sub-urbs built to slow white flight from the city drew many who might have attended City. By the early 1970s, the student body was down to 1,500, few of them white. The school was relegated to neighbor-hood status and its famed fast-track A Course slowed to a walk.

In 1976, a City alumnus, Mayor Wil-liam D. Schaefer, obtained funds for a first in Baltimore, the renovation of a high school rather than its replacement with a new building. The speaker at the rededi-cation of the \$8 million makeover was another alumnus, New York Times col-umnist Russell Baker, who in his autobi-ography *Growing Up* had described City as “a grim, Gothic fortress heaved up to shield civilization from the Vandals.”

City's academics were renovated as well, the A Course restored, and at the insistence of the School Board, female stu-dents entered the Castle. They now con-stitute 65% of the 1,500 student body—deemed capacity by today's standard—but Business Manager and long-time En-glish teach Susan Legg said major efforts are underway to attract more males to the school. All but 15% are African Amer-icans, and among the whites, Jews remain a sizable minority. Almost all graduates attend college. Alumni now include a Nobel in chemistry, two Medal of Hono winners and three current congressmen.

The Alumni Association has helped justify the school song, “City Forever.” For the 75th anniversary, it sought \$1,000 gifts from 75 alumni to fund amenities that lads in 1839 could not have imag-ined. The collection was oversubscribed.

Alumnus, Now Columnist, Salutes Formative Teacher

By Gregory Kane

Class of 1969

President Lyndon B. Johnson sent some 1,500 Marines to South Vietnam, an act which escalated the Vietnam War and eventually saw half a million American troops in that country.

A Nation of Islam hit squad gunned down Black Nationalist Muslim leader Malcolm X in Harlem's Audubon Ball-room. Alabama state troopers brutally beat a group of civil rights marchers—who were trying to walk to Montgomery to high-light the need for federal voting rights leg-islation—in Selma.

The black community of Watts in Los Angeles erupted in one of America's worst race riots. Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The year was 1965. Samuel Banks first entered the doors of Baltimore City College. He wasn't the first black teacher at the school, but he was surely among the most memorable. For those alumni who took one of Banks' history or social studies classes, that last event probably had as much im-pact on their lives as anything else that year. Although Banks spent three and a half years at City, he continued to influ-ence the lives of the boys he taught long after they left the Castle on the Hill.

A partial list of Banks' students in-cludes a former Baltimore mayor who is now the dean of Howard University Law School, the current congressman from Maryland's 7th District, a state delegate

from the 40th District and a former Balti-more County circuit court judge. Readers will recognize those City alumni as former Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke, Rep. Elijah Cummings, the late Del. Tony Fulton and former Judge Alexander Wright Jr.

Schmoke was the first black elected mayor of Baltimore. Wright was the first black judge to serve on a Baltimore County circuit court. Banks “instilled in me the desire to break barriers,” Wright said in a 1998 Baltimore Sun story. “He used to talk about the early '60s. He would dress in African garb and go downtown and inte-grate places.” Schmoke remembered Banks after his death in 1995: “My very first pa-per for him was about Black Muslims. The school system didn't recognize Black His-tory Month, but Dr. Banks decided to have his own Black History Month.”

My first encounter with Banks was in the City College cafeteria, when he chided a classmate for using profanity. It was the sign of a weak mind, Banks admonished him. I didn't learn until I enrolled in Banks' “Problems of Democracy” class in 1968 just how extensive his vocabulary was, and why he didn't need profanity. He could make his point using words that would send his befuddled detractors rush-ing to the dictionary.

Banks demanded that we think, that we challenge orthodoxy. He let us know we were free to voice opinions that clashed with his. “I'm not infallible,” he often told his students. But he was unforgettable.

Historians Challenged to Put Best Words Forward

Writers of Baltimore history are invited to compete for a \$500 prize newly established under the aegis of BCHS and bearing the name Joseph L. Arnold Memorial Prize. Dr. Arnold was a professor of history at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who focused on the history of this city until his death in 2004.

The prize was introduced by Prof. Garrett Power of the University of Maryland School of Law on May 26 at BCHS's Workshop for Baltimore Historians and is funded by Nancy B. Martel, semi-retired from the Education Division of the Maryland Historical Society, and her husband Thomas Martel, former chief executive of KLNb, Inc.

Entries for the prize should be unpublished manuscripts between 15 and 45 double-spaced pages, attached to electronic mail in MS Word or PC convertible format and submitted by January 15 to <http://www.historicbaltimore.org>.

At the May workshop in Westminster Hall, Edward C. Papenfuse, the Maryland State Archivist and keynote speaker, looked to the future in his discussion of "Historical Research and Writing in a Digital Age." Papenfuse assured the several

dozen attendees that this future is viable, if complex.

Prof. Power organized the workshop, which he hopes the Society will establish as an annual event. The panel discussion presented three practitioners of public history. Philip J. Merrill recollected "Black Memorabilia: The Storyteller of African American History." Mary Ellen Hayward focused on the town's architecture in "Baltimore History, Baltimore Buildings." And Dean Krimmel went in search of "Baltimore's Immigrant Past." A spirited question and answer period followed.

Website Successor Sought

Marilyn Julius, who put BCHS on the web in a big way, announced that for personal reasons she must give up her post as webmaster. The leadership thanked her for establishing and maintaining www.historicbaltimore.org and placed an urgent call for all potential replacements to respond via email to bchs@mdhs.com.

A Word for Our Sponsors

The Society thanks the Sept. 18 Mayor's Reception sponsors, including Kramon & Graham and the Charles Theatre.

Heritage Walks Step Off Sprightly With Markers

Mayor Martin O'Malley and business and community leaders initiated Heritage Walk, Baltimore's trail through four centuries of American history in July with placement of the initial trail markers. He was joined by the Urban Park Rangers who provide daily guided tours along the route.



The trail disks are being fabricated in 17 different languages, reflecting the world's most spoken languages and those spoken by immigrant groups at the sites. Heritage Walk is a joint project of Historic Jonestown, Inc. and the Baltimore City Heritage Area. Connecting 20 cultural heritage sites and museums, Heritage Walk is designed to make it easier for residents and visitors to experience heritage stories. The daily, Ranger-led, guided tours of Heritage Walk depart from the Visitor Center, 401 Light Street. For more information, visit www.heritagewalk.org or call Abbi Wicklein-Bayne, 443 984-2369.

To Join or Renew as BCHS Member

Please complete this form and mail with payment to the address at the right.

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My suggestion for naming the Newsletter is _____
(see story on Page 2).

BCHS Membership Dues

- \$100 Charter Member
- \$50 Sustaining
- \$20 Family
- \$15 Individual
- \$10 Student/Senior

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