

# BALTIMORE GASLIGHT

Newsletter of the Baltimore City Historical Society

Volume 7, Number 2

Fall 2008

## Baltimore's War Turned Adversary Into an Ally

By Geoffrey M. Footner

Author, coming "Baltimore's War—1812-1815"

On June 18, 2012, the United States will begin celebration of the 200th anniversary of its second war with Great Britain, known widely as the War of 1812. Maryland, Virginia and Washington, but particularly Baltimore, played significant roles. This city became so heavily involved that some contemporary Federalists referred to it as Baltimore's War.

The Treaty of Ghent, signed December 24, 1814, ending the war, recognized that no clear victor emerged. Therefore, it is appropriate to concentrate on the impact of the 2 1/2-year confrontation upon the citizens of the two nations. The war made the belligerents' colonial breakup complete, like a smashed crystal bowl. The treaty substituted for an unstable past the opportunity to remove old animosities with political and commercial agreements that caused the two nations to travel these 200 years not in lock step but as a well-choreographed duet. It established an alliance that allowed their citizens to benefit from the awesome changes that the 19th and 20th century wrought.

For the most part it has been a joyous relationship, which makes this war difficult to celebrate with just mock battles and reenactments. Looking through the war's records, as historians do, neither nation has presented unbiased dissertations. That, too, makes politically correct celebrations difficult. For instance, Samuel Smith and his fellow merchants, Baltimore's leaders in 1813, spent 18 months preparing the city's imposing defenses. In September 1814 they were seen as forbidding by the British commander, Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane, who proved to be a timid leader. Hence historiography, particularly British, treats the two-day battle of Baltimore as a standoff. In reality it was a decisive victory for the defenders.

Baltimoreans speak of the skirmish at Patapsco Neck with some embarrassment while underplaying the (Cont. on Page 2)



*The historic Lloyd Street Synagogue is under renovation. Members will attend the exhibit on the neighborhood's past at the Jewish Museum, to the right, at the corner of Lombard Street.*

## From the Chairman

### New Leaders Step Up

By John Carroll Byrnes

We welcome Judy Arnold, retired from the Office of the Attorney General, to active duty with the Society. Judy has agreed to be liaison with the Maryland Historical Society—including conversations about a closer relationship. She also will represent BCHS at meetings of the Greater Baltimore History Alliance and oversee our website in cooperation with our excellent webmaster, Marilyn Julius. We have ambitious plans for the site. Please send Baltimore-related material for it to Judy.jarmold@verizon.net.

Another welcome to Patrick Madigan, our new treasurer. The Society is grateful to Charlotte Cross, treasurer for many years, who remains on (Cont. on Page 2)

## From the President

### Weighing Peale Burden

By Sally Johnston

After a year at the helm of the Baltimore City Historical Society I am impressed by and grateful for the many people who work so hard to accomplish its mission of celebrating our community's rich past. This past year we sponsored a boat cruise to highlight the harbor's tercentenary, honored ten citizens at the annual Mayor's Reception (Cont. on Page 3)

## Jewish Museum to Relive Lombard Street Sept. 21; Mayor's Reception Nov. 8

The Baltimore City Historical Society offers members and guests a free visit to the Jewish Museum of Maryland on Sunday, September 21 at 1PM for the much acclaimed exhibit "Voices of Lombard Street: A Century of Change in East Baltimore." The museum at 15 Lloyd Street is just around the corner from the remnants of "corned beef row" on Lombard and sandwiched between Jones Falls and Central Avenue.

Next, and completing the Society's annual calendar, the Mayor's Reception and History Honors presentation will take place on Saturday, November 8, 1 to 4PM at the Parish Hall of the First Unitarian Church, Charles and Franklin Streets. The eight honorees include historian **Jessica Elfenbein** and, in the category of living history, **William Cardinal Keeler**, planner **Martin Millspaugh** and attorney **John C. Murphy**. Honorees in memoriam: ex-mayor **Clarence Du Burns**, ex-congressman **Parren J Mitchell**, attorney **Roger D. Redden** and newspaperman **John Dorsey**.

The Jewish Museum uses text, photos, film and sounds to recreate a pungent Lombard Street at the turn into the 20th century—a teeming open-air market by and for recent immigrants, mostly east European Jews, but with customers—particularly for live chickens—from all across the city. One of the images: a period bathtub with clawed feet, gurgling as a giant carp swishes in wait for preparation of a family's Passover gefilte fish. Attendees can also see the exterior of the Lloyd Street Synagogue, designed by Robert Carey Long Jr., which is under renovation. The tour, led by curators Deb Weiner and Anita Kassof, includes light refreshments.

Choice of the Eighth Mayor's Reception site is intended to commemorate the 200th birthday of Enoch Pratt (1808-96). The philanthropist, when treasurer of the Unitarian Church, donated the building and its organ in 1893. Its architect was Maxmilien Godefroy. The (Cont. on Page 4)

## From the Chairman

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the Board. Patrick looks forward to bringing our budget format into conformity with new nonprofit standards. A third welcome to James Carroll, our new Baltimore Book Collection chairperson. The collection continues to grow. Send us your Baltimore-related books.

BCHS thanks Board member Dr. Michael Franch, who is working on an interesting approach to our annual Baltimore history education program. Professor Garrett Power has resumed as chair of our Historian Council to bring it closer to its mission of assembling scholars to support our education programs, facilitate internships, and oversee the annual History Honors and the Arnold Baltimore History Essay competition. BCBS is grateful to Professor Kriste Lindenmeyer for her work with the Council.

Our Trustee representatives meeting on June 26 held a lively discussion about The Peale Museum/History Center project, approved the 2008 History Honorees recommended by the Board, considered a Trustee organization plan and agreed to cooperate with a Select Nominations Committee to be chaired by Board member John C Murphy. It will give attention to future BCBS leadership. Please send the names of your nominees to [jcmurphy@bellatlantic.net](mailto:jcmurphy@bellatlantic.net).

Our president and a few other Board members announced an independent and competing effort for the Peale restoration. Nevertheless, the BCBS effort to reopen the City's shuttered Peale continues in our Finance Committee, chaired by Buzzy Cusack, with John Sondheim as vice chair. They have continued the six-year initiative with several recent and productive meetings in City Hall. We hope for good news on that front. My recent Peale Survey revealed overwhelming support for the first of three options: a limited financial commitment by the Society, a somewhat broader commitment, or a call to look for new directions.

## Baltimore's War Assessed

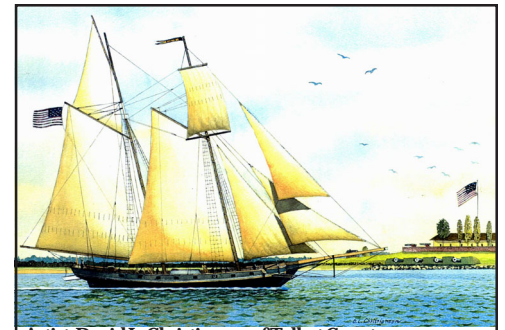
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incredible importance of the deathless Battle of Hampstead Ridge. And, as far as the siege of Fort McHenry is concerned, we see it for the most part as a memorial to the flag and the poem that celebrates it, rather than for what it was—an embarrassing performance by Cochrane, who refused to commit his ships close-in to danger. As a result, the battle we honor has been recorded in Britain as an essay and usually in America as a sideshow, following the British victory at Washington.

Historians of both nations, including the preeminent Henry Adams, went along with those interpretations. Yet in reality, the burning of Washington represented our low point in the war, while subsequent disappointing results for Britain at Baltimore, Plattsburg and on the northern lakes nudged it toward serious peace talks.

The real war was a nasty affair, fought on the high seas that the Royal Navy considered its own and in North America, where rambunctious frontier politicians pushed President James Madison to invade British Canada. The American army lost that phase of the war. At sea, our foreign commerce was destroyed, but another phase of the war belonged to the Americans, featuring Baltimore's private armed schooners. They were the most innovative weapon of the war, comparable to the success of submarines a century later. During most of 1814, our privateers, supplemented by a few from other ports, out-sailed the Royal Navy—destroying its aura of invincibility. That caused Parliament to focus its rage on the Admiralty's inability to protect British trade in home waters.

Readers can find in the stacks of George Peabody's Library Volume 29 of the House of Commons debates and read the speech of member Marryatt, an underwriter at Lloyds. On December 1, 1814, 24 days before a treaty was signed, he informed Parliament that Lloyds had the ships-lost lists they had demanded of the Admiralty: Britain had lost 1,175 vessels, of which 373 had been recovered. Since the new fleet of powerful Baltimore schooners had begun to attack ships in home waters in May of that year, the average number lost had been 50 ships per month. Marryatt said, "The owners of American privateers, with great judgment sent their ships close to our coasts and had there committed their depredations with great success. The ves-



Artist: David L. Christianson of Talbot County  
Painting of Baltimore-armed Comet.

sels employed for this purpose, being light-built and fast-sailing schooners, in summer weather and light breezes, eluded all attempts of the king's ships to catch them." None! Not one did the Royal Navy capture! Five days after Marryatt's speech in Parliament, Lord Bathurst, the king's minister for war, ordered his conferees at Ghent to get a treaty. They did in 19 days.

Perhaps during the upcoming celebrations we might salute the merchants of Baltimore who invested their treasure in privateers and the city's defenses. They certainly did not build those efficient, expensive schooners and send them to fight in the Irish Sea and English Channel for lack of patriotism. And also consider a memorial for the many deaths among the 20,000 American merchant seamen incarcerated by the British. America's privateer captains returned their prisoners to enemy ports and safe havens in captured vessels.

When Admiral Alexander Cochrane became commander of the North American theater in 1814, he issued a proclamation offering Maryland and Virginia slaves freedom when they reached his ships. Cochrane's intent was to have them join the Royal Navy but of an estimated 2,500 Tidewater slaves who sought freedom, 20 percent or less joined up. The majority faced many hazards including death, the return to slavery or a hard life in Maritime Canada. There is conclusive evidence that the admiral and his officers sent Afro-American prisoners and refugees into forced labor on West Indies plantations, and others were sold back into slavery. There seems to be little data about that unfortunate migration in Maryland's records, yet the issue was a major one at Ghent. Several theses on the subject celebrate its perpetrator, Cochrane, as a hero.

Two Baltimore mayors, Dr. Edward Johnson and Captain George Stiles, played important roles in preparing the city for the invasion the British promised in retaliation for the privateers' activities.

# Henry Barnes - The Man With Red and Green Eyes

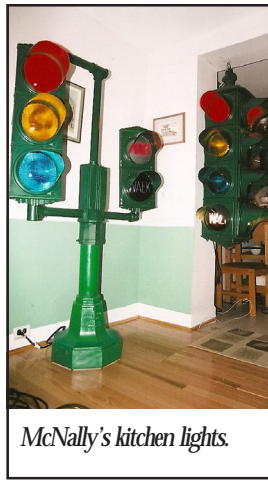
By Christopher M. McNally

Without a doubt, one of the most colorful political appointees in the history of Baltimore City was Henry Barnes, the cigar-smoking traffic commissioner hired by Mayor "Tommy" D'Alessandro in 1953 to tackle one of the worst traffic messes in the United States. City streets carried interstate traffic straight into busy, crowded downtown, creating at Pratt and Light Streets what Barnes described as "one of the worst traffic messes I have ever seen" — 82,000 cars passed through the intersection daily, with 60 percent making left turns. Pedestal-mounted traffic lights, nearly impossible to see, were connected to one ancient \$69 control box mounted with rusty nails in the men's room of police headquarters. Barnes mused that if the bathroom door were slammed too hard, all of the signals would flicker.

Barnes' repair shop flooded in the rain and had the largest and "bravest" cockroaches he had ever seen. He described Baltimore as a city of "menacing monuments that cluttered up the avenues, buses and cabs that operated as though they were fueled with high-octane bourbon, and pedestrians who just didn't give a damn."

D'Alessandro had given Barnes a "blank check" to unclog the traffic arteries, politics be damned, and he did so with the intensity of a surgeon performing triple by-pass surgery. Barnes took on all obstructions, with a wit matched by none. One early war was with Gordon's Crabhouse, at Patterson Park Avenue and Orleans Street. On hot summer nights, the crab-cake hungry double- and triple-parked on Orleans Street, Route 40, which carried a heavy volume of traffic.

On an August night in 1955, Barnes arrived to find what he described as a "king crab tie-up that was enough to make you lose your mind!" He asked a reporter, "What is there about crab cakes that makes these people so crazy?" Gordon's offered Barnes a pass for "free crab cakes for the entire family," which he promptly rejected. He also took on the Women's Civic League, in an ill-fated attempt to abolish the Flower Mart at Mount Vernon because it impeded traffic on Charles Street. Barnes described the League as a "formidable lot of influential ladies who loved a fight and usually won it by employing the tactics of a plague



McNally's kitchen lights.

of locusts." He promised them he would support the event if they procured 200,000 signatures on a petition. They provided 250,000 and soldiered on. It was one of the few organizations to win a significant battle against him.

Barnes also set out to eliminate streetcars, commenting that his only problem with them was that they "ran in the street." Barnes took on socialites opposed to his decision to reverse the then-southbound flow of traffic on Charles Street. A lady who spoke at the public hearing, clad in a mink jacket, advised that as an outsider, he simply could not appreciate that the "right" people don't drive their "carriages" from the south on Charles, "they drive them from the north." She went on to say that the people of South Baltimore might actually use Charles Street and that "these are the kind of people who don't appreciate Charles, who don't know what it stands for and should not be permitted to even walk on it." Barnes said the Street belonged to the citizens "regardless of the direction they were traveling, their ancestry, or their bank accounts." The traffic flow was ultimately reversed, as it remains.

Despite the monumental, human and crabby obstacles, Barnes improved the traffic. He multiplied one-way streets, replaced the bathroom box with a state of the art "master-controller" and brought in the "Barnes Dance"—wherein on downtown intersections the signals in all four directions would show red as neon lights flashed "WALK" for 30 seconds while motorists waited. He enforced parking restrictions at rush hour.

In 1961, after eight years, Barnes asked the mayor for a \$2,000 raise to \$20,000. Refused, he went to New York to become traffic commissioner and died on the job in 1968, of a heart attack at age 61. Before that, though, he wrote "The autobiography of Henry A. Barnes: The Man with the Red and Green Eyes," E.P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1965. That and Sandler, Gilbert, "Small Town Baltimore," Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2002, are prime sources of this account.

## From the President

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in the Frederick Douglass-Isaac Myers museum in Fell's Point, and held the annual historians' workshop at the Reginald Lewis Museum of Maryland African History and Culture. St. Mary's Chapel, celebrating its 200th year, was site of our June annual meeting.

The restoration and reopening of the City-owned Peale Museum is another BCHS endeavor, which has waxed and waned over eight years. John Carroll Byrnes, Chairman of the BCHS Board, has carried the torch from the beginning and has argued with great passion with city officials on the importance and significance of the building. Romaine Somerville, past president, raised \$290,000 in state, city and private funds and the city budgeted \$150,000 for a total of \$440,000 for the Peale. A year ago a Peale Committee of BCHS Board members and other interested historians was formed, spending countless hours in committee and city meetings to negotiate a lease. The issue has dominated BCHS board meetings. A brochure has been written describing the project, a business plan is in place, and a capital campaign for \$2 million is ready to be launched.

I have been very involved in all the meetings related to the Peale. By the end of the year, I and a few other members of the Peale Committee became convinced that BCHS was not the best organization to move the project forward. In our opinion BCHS's many worthy projects stretch the volunteer base to its limit.

As a result, over the summer, the Friends of the Peale, Inc., was organized, articles of incorporation written, a board formed, officers elected, and a nonprofit 501 (c) 3 status application filed. We approached the city to award the Friends of the Peale a lease to become the organization to restore and reopen it. The sole mission is to raise \$2 million to restore the Peale and reopen it to the public with exhibits on Baltimore history in time for the bicentennial celebration of the War of 1812. I believe that BCHS can breathe easier and continue to grow and celebrate Baltimore history without the burden of the Peale project. Some members of the BCHS Peale Committee continue to press the city to award the lease to BCHS.

The city is the ultimate arbiter in this matter. My hope is for resolution by the September 24 BCHS Board meeting.

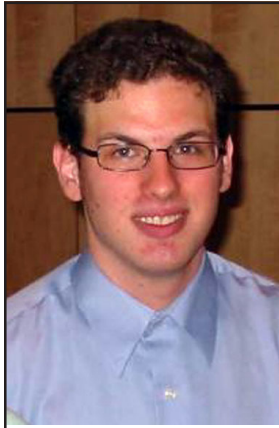
## When Racial Disparity Took to Park's Courts

By Judy Arnold

"Whites only" tennis courts once occupied the area just west of Druid Hill Park's trademark Conservatory, and rules forbade interracial competition. But on July 11, 1948, members of the Baltimore Tennis Club and the Young Progressives of Maryland challenged this state of affairs by staging interracial tennis matches—mixed doubles, mixed races. As over 500 people looked on, City police arrested 24 demonstrators. Seven were convicted of trespassing. Three years later, though, the Board of Recreation and Parks relaxed its rules against mixed play.

This July 11, a crowd including some of the original attendees commemorated the 60th anniversary of that important 1948 step in the integration of public sports facilities in Baltimore. The commemoration included a theatrical reenactment. John Dausch portrayed H.L. Mencken, who expressed the strong opinion that Baltimore tennis players ought to be able to choose their playing companions free from legal restrictions. Druid Hill at the time was one of the few public venues to provide even segregated courts for blacks.

The July 11 commemoration was



David H. Schley, a Ph.D. candidate at Johns Hopkins, is winner of BCHS's Joseph L. Arnold Prize for his essay, "Landscape and Politics: The Creation of Baltimore's Druid Hill Park,

1860". The award came at the May 9 Historians Workshop cosponsored with the University of Maryland Law School.

billed as "24-Love: The Most Unusual Score in Tennis." Baltimore City Youth Tennis and the Friends of Druid Hill Park accepted contributions at the event, at which BCHS was represented by Chairman John Carroll Byrnes. Mayor Sheila Dixon and other officials spoke, as did Mitzi Swan, 78, who lived on Auchentoroly Terrace in 1948 and frequently played tennis on the park courts. She recalled the protest as "one of the proudest moments in [her] life." Also listed as attending witnesses were Nellie Briscoe Garner, Joseph Parham, and Yummy Dotson. A plaque now marks the site, the courts having been moved.

## Society Finds Historic Sites

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program includes a tour of the church and light refreshments.

Among the honorees, Cardinal Keeler was archbishop of Baltimore from 1989 to 2007 and cardinal since 1994. Millspaugh was a major figure in the 1960s development of Charles Center and the Inner Harbor revival that followed. Murphy is a prolific lawyer and expert on land-use law. Elfenbein is a professor at University of Baltimore and director of the Center for Baltimore Studies. Her most recent book is "From Mobtown to Charm City," 2005.

In Memoriam honoree Burns was the city's first African-American mayor. Mitchell was Representative from the Seventh District and champion of the causes of poor African-Americans. Redden was revered for his wide knowledge of the law and Dorsey was arts and restaurant critic for the Baltimore Sun and author of books on Baltimore architecture.

Members who attended the June 7 annual meeting did so at an earlier Godefroy building, the 1806 St. Mary's Chapel on North Paca Street. A week later, the Chapel celebrated the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the eventual Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton to Baltimore and to the rededication of the building. Members also toured Seton's restored house.

### 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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#### BCHS Membership Dues

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

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