

BALTIMORE

CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Somerville Nominated for Society President, Byrnes for Chairman of Board

The Baltimore City Historical Society (BCHS) will hold its annual membership luncheon on Sunday, June 29 at 12:30 PM in the old Public Library Branch No. 2 to elect officers—with the Nominations Committee's slate headed by preservationist Romaine Stec Somerville for president—and to visit the nearby home of that card-carrying booster of the Enoch Pratt, H.L. Mencken.

Retired Circuit Court Judge John Carroll Byrnes, the inspiration and founding president of BCHS in December 1999, is the Committee's nominee for chairman of a 28-member Board of Directors, also newly nominated. The Board chooses and delimits the duties of its chair, and Byrnes declared, "If the Board asks me to be the chairperson . . . I would be glad to accept and would use the office however the president and the Board believe I could be most useful. I look forward to helping, as a committee member, with particular projects such as the Baltimore Book Collection and the BCHS web site."

Somerville has served for 10 years with the Society for the Preservation of Federal Hill and Fells Point, seven of them as executive director. She is a longtime resident of Bolton Hill, with her husband, retired Sun newspaperman Frank Somerville. She

was executive director of the City's Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation 1966-72, and director of the Maryland Historical Society 1978-84, and she is a member of half a dozen historical organizations.

Nominated as vice presidents are the Honorable Keiffer J. Mitchell and Dr. C. Neverdon-Morton, as treasurer Charlotte Cross C.P.A., and as secretary Pamela Kelly.

A Nominations Committee co-chair, Alfred W. Barry III, said the election "is noteworthy on two accounts: first, the election of the Board will inaugurate the transition of the three-year-old organization with its first elected Board of Directors. Up to now, an Executive Committee and numerous committee chairs have managed the organization. Secondly, this year's election will see Somerville succeed Byrnes as president, with Judge Byrnes becoming Board chair. It is our expectation that this new structure will provide the necessary policy direction that the organization requires as it matures."

Also being recommended is a new Presidential Advisory Council, comprised



Somerville helped Fells Point remain historic.

of committee chairs and members who provide specific organizational skills to the Society. "We believe this important new council will be an effective management tool for the new President and Board," said Barry. The Nominating Committee was co-chaired by Dr. Hilbert Stanley and assisted by Hunter Alfriend, Sebastian Cross, Robert Kershaw, and Judge Byrnes. When the committee began its

work, letters were sent to members soliciting their recommendations for new Board members. "Dr. Stanley and I wish to thank those of you that recommended so many of the candidates," said Barry. "An exceptional board is recommended with diversity and strength in all facets of Baltimore's history."

Byrnes said he was not a candidate for society president because of another retirement commitment, as chair of the Maryland Center for Character Education, "to which I want to devote more time, and also because I believe the Society would benefit from new leadership at this point in its brief history."

The City was left without a historical society when its Peale Museum closed in 1997 along with the other financially strapped City Life Museums. Its collection was placed in the care of the Maryland Historical Society, which provided start-up assistance including a temporary venue for the BCHS.

The June 29 membership meeting is at what now is the Neighborhood Design Center, at 1401 Hollins Street that was the public academe—later abetted by the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute—which prepared Mencken to become one of the most provocative writers and editors of the last century. He gave more credit to the library than to the high school. Robert J. Thieblot, a BCHS director and president of the Friends of the Mencken House, will speak on and lead the tour of Mencken's house nearby on Union Square.

Judge Accepts Award on Behalf of BCHS

In a ceremony on the 369th Maryland Founder's Day, at the Clarence M. Mitchell Jr. Courthouse, the Colonial Dames named the Honorable John Carroll Byrnes Marylander of the Year. Highlights of the March 25 gathering included words of praise for the president of the Baltimore City Historical Society from Governor Robert Ehrlich and Mayor Martin O'Malley. Both cited Judge Byrnes' years of service and dedication to Baltimore City and the State.

The Maryland Colonial Society's citation of Byrnes read, "By serving as a State Senator . . . and as a Judge on the Baltimore City Circuit Court, he has provided a sterling example of how an individual can selflessly, tirelessly and successfully dedicate his or her life to improving the public good

of this state." Judge Byrnes was also honored by members of the clergy for his work for fair and equal justice.

In accepting the award on behalf of BCHS, Judge Byrnes underlined his belief in history as the mold for the present and said he was honored "particularly on this important day and coming from the Maryland Colonial Society, which makes such great contributions to the cause of history in our lives." He also thanked his wife and three daughters, colleagues and friends for their presence. Next was a ceremony at the foot of the monument to the Second Lord Baltimore, Cecilius Calvert, and that was followed by a lunch reception at the Maryland Club attended by more than 100 family members and friends.

McNally's Museums: Baltimore Day; Babe at Ball Park; Fells Point Maritime Lore

By Christopher M. McNally

The BCHS, as part of its mission of promoting the history of Baltimore City, has become active in the Greater Baltimore History Alliance (GBHA)—pledging support for the museums of the region that also promote this varied history. From sports to streetcars, maritime and nautical history to dentistry, remnants of the past are alive and well in these museums. One of the larger events being planned by BCHS and GBHA is a *Baltimore Day*. We are hopeful that this event will become a major annual event for both organizations. The "Baltimore Day" concept is also supported by Baltimore Heritage Inc., the Baltimore Architecture Foundation and the Office of the Mayor.

Historian Wayne Schaumburg of BCHS, asked his choice for a proper Baltimore Day, picked August 8, going back to 1729 when the act creating the new town was signed by colonial governor Benedict Leonard Calvert. The petition for the creation of a town on the Patapsco was submitted by "the leading men of Baltimore County." To view a copy of the "Act", see Robert Vexler's book "Baltimore A Chronological & Documentary History 1632-1970," pages 88-93.

Another choice, said Schaumburg, is the incorporation in 1797. "The bill was passed in December 1796 and apparently took effect January 1. The mayor and council were not chosen until February. I have never thought much of this event since the town was already 67 years old." The other possible date would be January 14, 1730, the date the town was documented as having been surveyed and the first lots sold.

This column will be devoted to the promotion of the events in the museum community. We encourage you to avail yourselves of these wonderful historical resources. Many are volunteer organizations and in need of assistance - get involved! For a start:

Babe Ruth Birthplace and Museum, 216 Emory Street, 410 727-1539: The Babe Ruth Museum is conducting a \$5 million fund-raising campaign to better preserve and exhibit its collection of sport history and develop a 24,000-square-foot addition in the historic Camden Station at Camden Yards. It is to include exhibits, classroom space, a research library and theater, and it will complement the Babe Ruth Birth-

place just two blocks away.

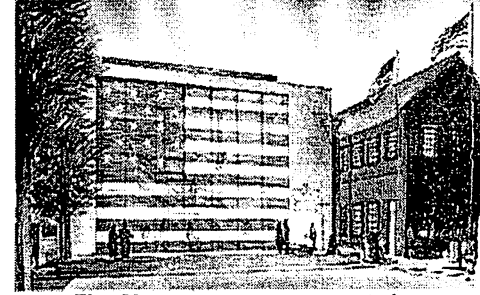
The new facility at Camden Station will showcase local baseball and football heritage and the tradition of Maryland sports. It also will focus on the role of the B&O Railroad in developing U.S. transportation, and the vital role Camden Station played in the Civil War.

Owned by the state, Camden Station will undergo an \$8.5 million reconstruction to be completed in 2005. The portion of the building not dedicated to the Museum will be leased for office use.

The Babe Ruth birthplace is also set to undergo restoration and expansion to make the Babe Ruth story handicapped-accessible. baberruthmuseum.com

Fells Point Maritime Museum, 1724 Thames Street, 732-0278: Opening on Monday, June 21, the Museum will showcase the Maryland Historical Society's collection of rare artifacts that illuminate the lives of those who lived and earned their living by the sea. A landmark since the mid-19th century, the building was originally a barn for the horse-drawn trolley service, and later became a warehouse for paper stock, iron and rope. The original features of the building contribute to the historic environment as visitors explore the rich history of the port through the museum's thematic areas: Fells Point's fascinating people, including privateers and shipbuilders; its fast ships, including the clipper schooners that worked as privateers during the War of 1812, and the trade and shipbuilding legacy. This is a cooperative venture between the Maryland Historical Society and the Society for the Preservation of Federal Hill and Fells Point. It will be open Tuesday through Sunday from 12:30 to 7:30 PM through Labor Day and then 10:30 AM to 5:30 PM to Memorial Day. Admission is \$4 for adults; \$3 for students and seniors; free for children 12 and under.

Hampton National Historical Site, 535 Hampton Lane, Towson, 823-1309: On Saturdays and most Thursdays in June, the site offers 45-minute guided garden tours. On Sunday, July 13 at 2:00 PM, Prof. Debra Newman-Ham will discuss "The Colonization of Maryland Blacks in Africa in the 19th Century." On Sunday, August 10 at 2:00 PM, Lynne Hastings, the curator, will talk on maintenance of the museum. www.nps.gov/hamp



Flag House opens its picture window.

The Flag House and Star-Spangled Banner Museum, 844 E. Pratt St, 837-1793: The Museum will dedicate its Great Flag Window on Thursday, June 12. This is a 30-by-42-foot showcase that is the same size, color and design as the original flag—which was made by Baltimore's Mary Pickersgill at the adjacent Flag House. Exhibits in the new Star-Spangled Banner Museum, to be completed in June 2004, will focus on the War of 1812, during which Maryland lawyer Francis Scott Key jotted down the poem that became the national anthem. Features include details about the Chesapeake Bay campaign and the role of African Americans in the war. Beginning this June, the new museum will offer an orientation film in the new theater, an expanded gift shop for flags and unique patriotic gifts as well as a hands-on room for children. Guided tours of the Flag House are offered throughout the day. www.flaghouse.org

Baltimore Streetcar Museum, 1901 Falls Road, 547-0264: The Jones Falls Valley bicycle/hiking path will pass directly through the museum property, enhancing the scenery and foot traffic to the lower mill valley site of the Museum. It is working with the city to study expanding the property for additional streetcars and rubber-tired vehicles. The Museum has acquired new vehicles, including an ex-San Diego, ex-El Paso car that carried passengers between El Paso, Texas, and Juarez, Mexico. It is a President's Conference Committee streamliner, built in 1936 by the St. Louis Car Co., and will be rebuilt to match the Baltimore cars of its type.

Help Wanted

BCHS cries out for a part-time paid office administrator and a volunteer assistant administrator who can bring computer powers to bear on organizing an unruly band of historians. Call BCHS or email as shown on Page 4.

B&O Museum's 175th Derailed When Storm Took Down Roundhouse

By Courtney B. Wilson

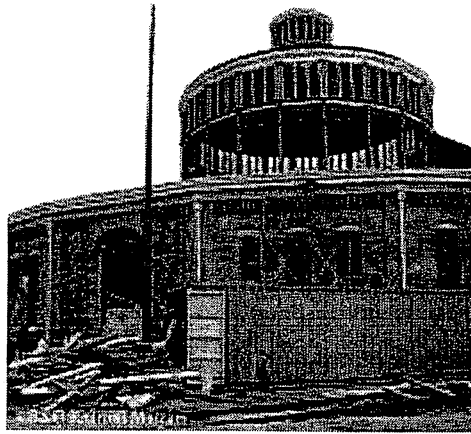
Executive Director, B&O Railroad Museum

Baltimoreans built America's first railroad and they rode it into an explosive industrial age. The B&O Railroad Museum on West Pratt Street was to have been hosting a national celebration, "175 Years: America on Track," this summer to bring this history back to life. That jaunty toot of a train whistle turned into a dirge for the roof of the historic roundhouse when a freak February snowstorm brought it down on part of the collection.

The finale of the 16-month celebration had to be canceled. It spanned two landmark dates—the government's first charter of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad on February 27, 1827, and the laying of the first stone on July 4, 1828. A previous such fair, put on by the B&O 75 years ago, was an epic event in the city's history.

Conceiving a long distance "rail road" emanating from Baltimore and reaching to the Ohio River was the spectacular gamble of far-thinking merchants committed to saving this City's economic health from competing canals in New York and Washington that would divert western goods from Baltimore's port.

Designed as a groundbreaking public-private venture, The B&O was chartered by



Rubble from collapse stored for later look.

the State of Maryland as America's first long distance railroad. Utilizing rudimentary technology imported from England, the B&O redesigned these concepts to match the challenge of the American terrain and became America's prototypical railroad.

The B&O was America's railroad of "firsts" with a roster of inventions, concepts and historical events unmatched by any other industry. In the world of socio-economic events, the creation of the B&O launched American expansion, fueled the fledgling industrial revolution to its zenith, established long-distance communication and created fortunes that would become the source of philanthropy across the world.

In Baltimore, the B&O was the largest industry, economic force and employer for nearly five generations—leaving an indelible mark on the culture, economy, society and architecture. At the outset a concept as exotic as space travel today, trains still carry goods and people to, from, through and under this city.

This summer's pageant was to feature the "first, best and only" locomotives from railroads, museums and private collections across the Western Hemisphere. Now the task is to resuscitate the museum's own priceless—yet, blessedly, insured collection. Four locomotives from the Roundhouse collection participated in the 1927 Fair: the Tom Thumb (1830/1926) and the Lafayette (1837/1927), the Atlantic (1836) and the William Mason, B&O #25 (1856).

The Museum already had celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Western Maryland Railroad last summer, and a trainload of enthusiasts rode behind a restored 1953 locomotive in July. Now the Museum staff and volunteers are dedicated to restoring the roof and collection. Events to culminate the B&O's 175th are shifting 13 miles to the west at Ellicott City, at the station that was the railroad's first stop. The B&O Museum's phone is 410-752-2490 and the web site is www.borail.org.

Baltimore Ablaze: Great Fire of 1904 Rekindled Civic Fervor - - and Does So Anew

By Robin Kiel McDonnell
Maryland Historical Society

On February 7-8, 1904, a catastrophic fire raged through Baltimore, reducing to rubble 86 blocks of the city—from the Harbor north to Lexington St. and from Liberty St. east to the Jones Falls, including all of the Pratt Street piers.

Almost all of downtown burned to the ground, more than 1,500 buildings and 2,500 businesses were devastated. Miraculously, no one died. Even as the fire smoldered, Baltimoreans rallied and declared the event "a landmark not of decline but of progress."

The Maryland Historical Society will open the exhibition "Baltimore Ablaze: The Great Baltimore Fire of 1904" on February 7 to mark the 100th anniversary. Visitors will follow the story from devastation to rebirth. This exhibition will also include new research on the role of the African American community in response to the fire.

The complete story of the Fire will be depicted through five thematic areas:

1. Baltimore before the Fire, an overview of how The Great Baltimore Fire of 1904 af-

ected the city and its national significance

2. "Big Fire in Baltimore," its progression, the men who fought it and protected the city, the devastation

3. Building a new and improved Baltimore

4. Documenting and Commemorating the Great Baltimore Fire of 1904

5. Fire Safety Today

Scheduled to run through October 2004, Baltimore Ablaze will occupy 4,500 square feet in the Historical Society's new exhibition gallery. The fire will come to life in a display of objects, photographs, and documents from the Society's collection, many of which have never been on display. They include personal remembrances, film footage taken just after the fire by associates of Thomas Edison, and a video recreation simulating the fire.

Items in the exhibition include:

* A recording of the folk song "Baltimore Fire" recorded by Charlie Poole in 1929.

* Hundreds of burned relics, including H.L. Mencken's copy spike recovered from the incinerated Herald. The young editor found a willing press owner in Washington and,

railroading back the papers, did not miss an edition.

* Images of firemen fighting the fire, helmets, badges and a list of all Baltimore City firefighters who fought in 1904.

* Model of the Cataract, the fireboat that fought the fire.

* Letters recommending how to rebuild the city, including those of Frederick Law Olmstead, Jr.

* La France Steam Pumper, 1905, one of ten added to the City's fleet after the Fire.

The Society is partnering with the Fire Museum of Maryland for the exhibition and events, including bus and walking tours of the Burnt District and a lecture and book signing (on Feb. 12 at 7 p.m.) by Pete Peterson, author of "The Great Baltimore Fire: How Baltimore Fought Back," to be published by the Society in 2004.

Word of Thanks

We thank the Honorable William Donald Schaefer and Wallace H. Campbell & Co. for helping BCHS celebrate Baltimore City history.

Society's Programs Range From Embattled Archives to Fate of Peale Collection

The Baltimore City Historical Society continued its seasonal programs with a lunchtime visit, on May 7, to the little-known, beleaguered, yet vital Baltimore City Archives, tucked in an otherwise empty factory on Druid Park Drive near Jones Falls. City Councilman and Society member John Cain, who arranged the program, lamented the shrunken budget of the service, saying, "I don't even know if I'm going to run again" because of his frustration with such under funding.

The historical focus of the June 29 membership meeting will be on the state of the collections of the Peale and the other City Life Museums that closed in a 1997 municipal cutback. Panelists include Anne Pomykala, president of the 1840s Corporation; Nancy Davis, deputy director, and Bea Hardy, deputy library director of the Maryland Historical Society, and President Robert Thieblot of Friends of the Mencken House. Thieblot, also on the board of the BCHS, will lead a tour of the Mencken House on nearby Union Square.

At this fall's Annual Mayor's Reception Brunch, with Mayor Martin O'Malley on September 21, from 12:30 to 2:00 PM in Clifton Mansion, the Society will honor historians and tour the mansion in Clifton Park

History Honorees

The following comprise this year's BCHS honorees in history, to be celebrated at the Mayor's Reception on September 21:

Historian Honors

♦Mr. Frank R. Shivers, Jr., Baltimore historian known for his "Walking In Baltimore, an Intimate Guide to the Old City."

♦Dr. Suzanne Ellery Chapelle, writer on Baltimore's and blacks' history, at Morgan State University.

Living History Honors

♦Mr. Samuel Hopkins, civic leader and friend of Baltimore history.

♦George L. Russell Jr., Esq., civic leader who is responsible for the new African American Museum being constructed on President Street.

♦Mr. John Waters, celebrated movie director of movies, including *Hairspray*.

♦Mr. Walter Sondheim Jr., civic leader, often referred to as Mayor Sondheim for his role in downtown redevelopment.

—which is under painstaking restoration, the pace limited by shortage of funds.

Getting back to the struggling Baltimore City Archives, its statutory purpose is to maintain the written record of the Mayor and City Council. Boxes of paper come by truck and shelf space is found. Other, mustier shelves hold crumbling records of a wider municipal swath from

less parsimonious times—Bureau of Harbors, 1797-1951; War of 1812 Records; Baltimore Town Commissioners, 1729-1797. No climate control is at hand to prevent their crumbling. Research by residents is not encouraged—for the staff numbers only two, abetted by one mid-sized photo copier. A couple of genealogists gave impromptu testimony to the difficulty of their pursuits.

Archivist Rebecca Gundy described her efforts to keep even with the work and State Archivist Dr. Edward C. Papenfuse, making his initial visit to his City counterpart as a speaker for the lunch meeting, declared, "I've never seen a facility so under-resourced." Maryland's Archives employ 41, with another 41 on contract, he said, estimating that on that basis the City's should need 20 to 30 workers. His agency's budget from the State is \$5 million, supplemented by \$2.5 million collected from customers researching land records. He suggested that the City Archives similarly could secure income by charging for research of records made readily available.

A winter meeting being coordinated by Jerry Hynson will focus on African-American History in Baltimore on October 29, from 5:15 to 7:00 PM, and a tour of Blacks in Wax Museum, 1601 East North Avenue.

Board Nominees

The following are nominees for the Board of Directors to be voted upon at the June 29 BCHS meeting:

Directors 2003-07

Hunter Alfriend
J.C. Byrnes
Annye Bynum
Sebastian Cross
Hon. John Cain
Charles Cusack
James Dilts

Directors 2003-05

Sen. Verna Jones
Anita Kassof
Lisa Keir
Robert Kershaw
Dean Krimmel
Hon. Julian Lapidés
W. Edward Leon

Directors 2003-06

Lewis Diuguid
Charles Duff
Richard Flint
Mark Foster
Sen. Lisa Gladden
William Henry
Phillip Hildebrandt

Directors 2003-04

John C. Murphy
Christopher McNally
John McLay
William Pencek
Cynthia Pyle
Wayne Schaumburg
John Sondheim

Admonishing Members

* Celebrate Baltimore history by renewing membership - or joining - by mailing to address at right, by calling 410.685.3750 ext. 379, or by emailing below.

* The Baltimore Book Collection continues to grow. Isn't it time to part with your collection? Send book donations to BCHS at the same address.

bchs@mdhs.org

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