

BALTIMORE

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BCHS Leads Effort to Reopen, Refocus Peale

By Romaine Somerville
President of BCHS

The Baltimore City Historical Society has received a \$20,000 matching grant from the Baltimore City Heritage Area Program to prepare studies and plans that will lead to reopening the Peale Museum, a National Historic Landmark sitting vacant across Holliday Street from the current City Hall.

The Peale, designed in 1813 by Robert Cary Long Jr., a prominent city architect, is the first structure in the United States built as a public museum. Peale soon lit the building with the latest technology, gas, and that led to the founding in 1816 of the Baltimore Gas Lighting Company—the first in the nation and the start of what

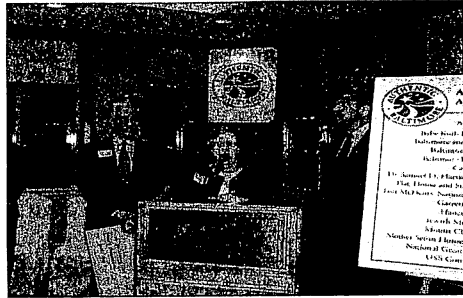


Photo by Hunter Alfriend
BCHS President-elect Robert Kershaw and President Romaine Somerville accept a check for Peale efforts from Mayor Martin O'Malley.

today is Constellation Energy Group. The building is a prime surviving example of the classical revival style popular in Baltimore in the early 19th century. It is associated with two members (Cont. on Page 4)

Resettling 22-Faceted Jewel of the B&O -- The Architect's Roundhouse Perspective

By Walter Schamu, FAIA

After a snowstorm on February 19, 2003, half of the roof of the famous 1884 Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Museum Roundhouse crashed to the floor, causing millions of dollars in damage to the building and the priceless collection of rolling stock housed within. It was defiantly a night to remember.

It was clear from the start that the effort for the rebuilding of the 1884 Roundhouse should be led by the museum's executive director, Courtney Wilson, who quickly grasped the gravity of the situation and redirected his staff's energies from running a museum to rebuilding this Roundhouse—the most significant icon of railroading on the B&O campus. He as-

sembled his team of experts including engineers, architects and contractors to assess the damage, set out a reconstruction plan, and begin the process.

As we got into the project, we began to realize the significance of this undertaking. The B&O was the first commercial railroad in the western hemisphere when it began in Baltimore in 1827. This building, the Roundhouse, built in 1884, was a 22-sided structure, a national historic landmark, and is one of only two fully enclosed roundhouses remaining in the country. Our first task was to learn as much as we could about the building, how it was built, what were the materials, what was original construction, and what had changed over time. Luckily, a few drawings existed in the museum's archive as well as the Historic American Buildings Survey's documentation of the building from the 1970s. Based on these drawings, historic photos, archival research and site observation, the design team was able to reconstruct plans, elevations, sections and details closely reflecting the original building.

A key decision was to what period the building should be restored. Were we to go back to a state of earlier (Cont. on Page 2)

Society Cosponsors Historians' Workshop; Elections Due on June 4

The Baltimore City Historical Society is cosponsor of a Workshop for Baltimorean Historians to be held on Thursday, May 26, at Westminster Hall, Fayette and Greene Streets, from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m., and the Society's annual meeting for election of officers will take place at 10 a.m. on Saturday, June 4, at Preservation Maryland in the historic former St. Paul's Rectory, 24 West Saratoga Street. A "behind the scene" tour of the nearby Clarence Mitchell Courthouse will follow.

At the Workshop, BCHS will announce establishment of the Martel Essay Prize on the History of Baltimore, which is to be awarded next year. The Workshop is chaired by Professor Garrett Power of the University of Maryland School of Law and keynote speech will be by Edward C. Papenfuse, the state archivist, on "Historical Research and Writing in the Digital Age." A panel of historians includes:

- Mary Ellen Hayward on use of land and business record in the study of Baltimore row houses.
- Phillip Merrill on memorabilia, cultural artifacts and oral histories in African-American history.
- Dean Krimmel on using material culture to put Baltimore on display.

The public is invited to attend and participate in the free workshop but registration is required. It can be completed online at <http://www.acteva.com/booking.cfm?bevaID=85485>. For details, call Marie Schwartz at 410.706.3838. Other sponsors include the University of Maryland Law School and the Westminster Preservation Trust. Westminster Hall adjoins the former Westminster Presbyterian Church and Western Burying Ground, which includes the grave of Edgar Allan Poe. Tours of Ground will be available after the Workshop, and lunch is encouraged at Lexington Market, a block away.

The Society's June 4 annual meeting will be chaired by Romaine Stec Somerville, who is concluding two (Cont. on Page 4)

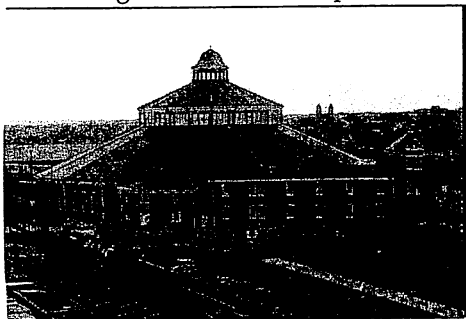


Photo by B&O Railroad Museum
After nearly fatal snowfall, an elegant return.

EDITORIAL: CHAP's Stand Must Be Firm

Since the Newsletter's editorial last fall on the plight of the city's Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, prospects for salvaging this front-line defense of Baltimore's legacy have brightened—thanks to vigorous intervention by citizens' groups, with Baltimore Heritage in the lead. It appears that CHAP's director will continue to serve, rather than the director of planning, thus avoiding a potentially grievous conflict of interest. And the City Council proposal of reserved seats on the seven-member commission for other government agencies may be off the table. The preemptive bureaucratic shifting of CHAP, placing it under planning, appears at this juncture to be a fait accompli though. Mayor Martin O'Malley must be held responsible.

And what is missing, still, is a clarion voice from the commission itself defending its turf and indeed attempting to expand it as a resurgent city deals with the often conflicting issues of preservation and development. As Chairman John C. Byrnes of BCHS declared before the commission, "The reputation of CHAP has been seriously eroded in recent months because of your virtual acquiescence in the destruction of your autonomy, even if it was motivated by a desire to save CHAP jobs that you believed were threatened."

Name this Newsletter!

Since this journal appeared in the propitious palindromic year of 2002, its inspiration, Judge John Carroll Byrnes, has gabbled for a great rendering by the membership to give it a proper name. Here, then, a contest: Name the newsletter. The winner will be immortalized in the masthead and invited to crack crabs with the Chairman. Write your inspiration in the form on Page 4 and include a sketch if your choice cries for it. The staff only came up with White Steps of Blatimore on two marble slabs. Let's hear from you!

B&O, Nearly Snowed Under, Again Stands Firm

(continued from Page 1)

times, circa 1950, when it became a museum, or back to the original car shop? Those decisions were reviewed many times by the design team, which resolved to return the building as closely as possible to its 1884 configuration. Recognizing that in the reconstruction it was no longer a roundhouse or passenger car shop, but clearly had the function of a modern museum, this meant the introduction of new building codes and modifications that would provide access for the disabled and for modern technologies—such as insulation in the roof.

This issue was studied at length only to discover that adding insulation to a building that is basically an acre in size was not cost effective and created other problems—such as the fixing of slate tiles onto insulation board, and changing roof profiles. Other issues addressed were the use of insulated glass windows.

However, since it was decided that air conditioning was not feasible because of cost, the use of insulated windows became less of an issue. Much time was spent discussing whether or not the interior, par-

ticularly of the roof, would be painted or left natural wood. It was discovered that not only the lower roof, but the intact upper roof needed replacement, so the decision was made to leave the underside of the roof areas exposed as unpainted wood, as they were in 1884.

Matthew Mosca, historic paint specialist, recreated through research the color palate of the rest of the interior. Although the colors are not unusual—red, white, black, and gray—where they occurred was documented and the building was repainted accordingly. Other amenities included, museum-quality lighting, wheelchair accessibility, "man doors" within new train sliding doors, new exhibit space, bathrooms and exhibit space for the grand old building.

After a year and nine months of reconstruction and with the remarkable energies of the museum staff, the contractor Whiting-Turner, the structural and mechanical engineers of Century Engineering Co, as well as numerous other specialty consultants, this icon of American railroading is back in use, drawing awe from new visitors and old admirers.

When Baltimore Ran on Railroad Time

By James D. Dilts

The impact of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Garrett family on the City of Baltimore in the last half of the nineteenth century was the subject of the second annual Garrett Jacobs Mansion symposium, March 18-20, a weekend of talks and tours.

"Baltimore Fulfills a Bold Vision, the Garretts and the B&O Railroad," opened Friday night with a dinner at the mansion followed by a talk by William F. Howes Jr., a former B&O vice president who was its last director of passenger services before Amtrak's takeover in 1971. Howes' illustrated lecture traced the inexorable decline of the B&O's famous trains under competition from the Interstate Highway System and the airlines. Responding to a question about the current state of railroad passenger service and Amtrak, Howes, who wrote the engineering specifications for the Metroliner engines, said: "We've spent all this money and we aren't any farther ahead than we were 30 years ago."

About 120 people attended the day-long series of talks on March 19. B&O expert John P. Hankey, a railroad consultant and author, gave the overview of the company under the direction of John Work Garrett, the B&O's powerful president, who steered it through the Civil War

and the later period of expansion to Chicago and New York, when it was outmaneuvered by the Pennsylvania Railroad. His assessment of Garrett—a great leader, but flawed railroad strategist.

Two papers, by Kathleen W. Sander and James R. Garrett, revealed the wide-ranging philanthropies of the Garrett family. Sander could not attend the conference; actress Yvonne Erickson read her paper on Mary Elizabeth Garrett, whose \$354,000 gift to The Johns Hopkins University in 1892 allowed it to open the School of Medicine. Her requirements that the school admit women and maintain high entrance standards resulted in the first coeducational, graduate-level medical school in America. Several Garrett family members were serious art collectors. The Baltimore Museum of Art's large collection of prints and the Antioch mosaics were two Garrett gifts that benefited all Baltimoreans.

BCHS member Dean Krimmel, consultant to the Baltimore Immigration Project, gave a stimulating slide talk on Locust Point, Baltimore's Ellis Island, and its immigrant facilities developed by the B&O. (His bus tour the next day covered the same territory; one conference attendee came from Chicago to see where her ancestors had landed in the United States.)

Since O'Donnell's Ship Came In, Canton Has Found Prosperity on the Waterfront

By Dr. Raymond D. Bahr

Today's Canton Historic District of about 350 acres is an urban-industrial neighborhood in Southeast Baltimore featuring 91 square blocks of row houses built close to the harbor and to the commerce of the larger Canton industrial community. However, early Canton encompassed a much larger tract. When Colonel Colgate, it's first known settler, died in 1722 he bequeathed to his wife and children some 6,000 acres between Harris Creek and Colgate Creek.

In 1785, Captain John O'Donnell, an adventuresome Irishman, sailed into Baltimore Harbor from Canton, China. His ship was piled high with silks and satins, tea and fine china. After making a hefty profit on the sale of his cargo, he purchased 2,500 acres east of Fell's Point and called his plantation Canton. He married Sarah Elliott from Fell's Point and built their home in Canton. As recounted by Canton historian Norman Rukert, O'Donnell became quite the gentleman farmer, importing prize cattle for breeding and planting a large peach orchard. Peach brandy spiced lavish family parties. He made his last ocean trip in 1787 but retained interest in trade between Baltimore and the Far East. His Chesapeake was the first American vessel to trade with India. He died in 1805 at 56 as one of the wealthiest men in America.

O'Donnell's eldest son Columbus was born in 1792. He became friends with William Patterson and they traveled to New York City in 1828 to interest Peter Cooper, a well-known capitalist and inventor, in formation of a real estate venture known as the Canton Company. They were successful and in 1829 the Canton Co. was granted the right to incorporate. It purchased the estate of Colonel John O'Donnell and later the remaining estate of Colonel Colgate—thus owning all the waterfront property from Fell's Point to Lazaretto Lighthouse, about 3,000 acres. The company was authorized to lay out streets and to construct wharves, houses and factory buildings. Industrialization of the Canton waterfront was assured when railroad lines approached the easily navigated harbor. Canton became the vibrant center for many of Baltimore's major early industries. This provided the economic engine to make Baltimore the nation's third largest city.

Besides being considered one of



Maryland Historical Society

From lithograph by E. Sachse & Co. in 1869.

Baltimore's earliest city planners, Columbus O'Donnell was president of the Baltimore Water Co., director of the Union Bank and president of the Baltimore Gas and Electric Co. He died in 1873 at 81, one of the city's wealthiest and most honored citizens. Industrialization accelerated. Skilled workers immigrated from Europe: Irish, Germans, Italians, Welsh, Poles and Greeks carved out districts within Canton, as evidenced by their churches—St. Casimir's for the Polish, St. Brigid's for the Irish, Sacred Heart for the Germans, Canton Baptist Mission for the Welsh, etc.

Entrepreneurs descended upon the area, such as William Patterson, a wealthy shipping merchant who later gave Patterson Park to the city. He was the first president of the Bank of Maryland and the first director of the B&O Railroad.

The Canton Racetrack flourished during the mid-1820s where Clinton and Boston Streets now meet and was a gathering place for America's most prominent racing men and their legendary horses. At this site also was a tavern constructed of white-washed logs known as the White House that overlooked the area of coastline known as Canton Hollow. Clipper ships rested there before the trip into Baltimore harbor. Canton Hollow had a sandy beach and on Sunday was known as the Baptizing Shore

Baltimore, Where Carroll Flourished . . .

"The problem of how to keep traditional towns alive, without destroying what makes life worth living in them, remains. There is no easy answer, no grand, sweeping solution. But to love one's own town, and to learn everything one can about its history and what gives it its individuality, is at least a step in the right direction."—Culled by Frank R. Shivers from historian Mark Girouard's *The English Town* (New Haven, 1990)

for the Baptists in the area. Perhaps the most famous event at Canton Racetrack occurred on May 4, 1840, when thousands of Whigs marched there from Baltimore and Charles Streets for their national convention to ratify the nomination of William Henry Harrison for president. Orators included Henry Clay and Daniel Webster.

The Frigate USS Constellation was built in Canton at the Harris Creek boat yard in 1797. Many of the Baltimore Clipper ships were built in Harris Creek. The Baltimore Clipper played a major role in the War of 1812. Before it, the English were the acknowledged leaders of the seas.

Clipper ships were small boats (75-100 feet) and were fitted with tall schooner rigs that allowed them to sail within 60 degrees of the direction of the wind. The Baltimore Clipper was one of the fastest vessels and was a source of contention for the English Navy. The English traveled up the Chesapeake Bay in the War of 1812 after burning Washington and were planning to do the same with Baltimore when they were stopped at the Battle of Fort McHenry and North Point. The defense of Baltimore obtained for the United States freedom of the seas and made famous the U.S. flag and the national anthem.

Today, Harris Creek outflow drainage is the focus of an attempt, initiated in Canton by the Baltimore Harbor Watershed Association and the city, to regain environmentally clean and safe water throughout the harbor.

Father James Gibbons was the first pastor at St. Brigid's Church in Canton and at the same time pastor at another Catholic church in Locust Point. He would travel by boat each morning from Locust Point to Canton Hollow so that he could say Mass at both churches. Later he became James Cardinal Gibbons, archbishop in Baltimore, and was an important political figure at the turn of the 19th Century.

Thus Canton became the lifeline of Baltimore City as it developed into a great industrial center and became the "fancy of Wall Street." Canton spawned many entrepreneurs and merchant princes who later became civic city leaders and philanthropists. This romantic adventure was put into play by the Canton Company and the interconnecting railroad system.

References include "Historic Canton" by Norman G. Rukert, 1978; "Canton Days" by the Canton Co.; Canton Historic District as listed in the Maryland State Historic Trust.

Peale Museum to Reemerge as History Center

(Continued from Page 1)

of the illustrious Peale family of artists, Rembrandt, who commissioned it as a museum, and Rubens, who managed it until 1829 when it closed.

Next the Peale was City Hall, 1830-78, then Colored School No. 1, 1878-89, and after a major renovation in 1931 it opened as the Municipal Museum—destination of school trips for generations of city youngsters and of inquiring visitors. As the city Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (CHAP) has noted, for 25 cents they partook of “birds, beasts . . . antiquities and miscellaneous curiosities,” in short, a mammoth experience, usually narrated by the late Director Wilber-Hunter.

Another renovation in 1979 led to more emphasis on city history. The Peale became part of the City Life Museums several years later, only to close with the rest in a 1997 municipal financial crisis. Its collection, including portraits by Rembrandt Peale, was shifted to the Maryland Historical Society. The city agreed to reopen the building for BCHS’s annual mayoral reception three years ago and attendees found it in good condition.

BCHS has the goal of reopening the Peale to the public for contemporary use as the Baltimore City History Center. The first step is a feasibility study to identify preservation and structural needs, current code requirements and estimates of construction and operating costs for reuse. Handicapped accessibility is a major factor. The proposed center could house the Society as well as Baltimore Heritage and the Baltimore Architecture Foundation. CHAP also was thought a likely occupant but the commission recently has taken up quarters within City Planning.

The \$20,000 grant is to fund preliminary architectural drawings and preparation of materials to raise needed capital.

Executive Director Johns Hopkins of Baltimore Heritage was quoted by architectural critic Edward Gunts of The Sun as saying, “The Peale is a fantastic historic building and squarely in line with our mission for Baltimore Preservation.”

Tour of Courthouse

(Continued from Page 1)

years as president, and Robert B. Kershaw, who for the last year has been president-elect. A full slate of officers is to be recommended by the Nominating Committee. Among a cohort of guides for the subsequent tour “of spaces not normally seen by jurors and casual visitors” at the century-old Courthouse is BCHS’s specialist in the topic, Judge John Carroll Byrnes. He recently was quoted in The Sun as saying the building was redolent of rodent, but he can be depended on to avoid that aspect during the tour.

This year’s Annual Mayor’s Reception and History Honors Announcement is planned for 12:30 p.m. on Sunday, September 18 at the new Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, 830 East Pratt Street. Another gathering, is to be at the nearly completed Maryland Sports Museum in the historic Camden Station.

This Is Your Last Free Newsletter

We have been mailing the Newsletter to an extended list of historically minded Baltimoreans, beyond the solid core of BCHS

members. This is the last time we will mail to nonmembers. Don't miss the next issue. Become a BCHS member with coupon below.

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

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