

Becoming Butchers Hill

A Brief History Compiled By Rick Gilmour

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I. From Plantation to Village — 1667 to 1866

Fifty years after the *Arc* and the *Dove* landed at St. Mary's, the first colonial land claim was made in what is now Butchers Hill. That claim led to two centuries of plantation and village life in the area before urbanization took off after the Civil War. This first section gives some highlights of these two formative centuries. — **R.G.**

1667... From a ship anchored in a clear stream near what are now ball fields in Patterson Park, Quinton Parker and his fiancée Mary Onley viewed 100 acres of land they claimed as colonists. On the west side of the creek, running north from the Patapsco to near the current Jefferson Street, this tract was soon conveyed to John Kemp, a planter, who combined it in **1683** with 100 acres to the east. Kemp sold his plantation 25 years later to Nicholas Rogers, who built his house on it — perhaps the first dwelling in the area. The land passed to Rogers's son, William, then to his grandson, Benjamin.

1776... By the revolutionary war, the rise of land containing Rogers's home was called "Hampstead Hill" How this name came about is unclear, but a recent British visitor to Butchers Hill remarked on the similarity of the view from the Pagoda toward Highlandtown with the view from Hampstead Heath in London.

1792... Eventually, Benjamin Rogers defaulted on his debts, and the sheriff auctioned off the 200-acres. William Patterson, an Irish-American shipping magnate, was the successful bidder. Patterson never lived on the property, but his heirs were still developing it in the 1890s.

Also in **1792**, a new bridge was built over the Jones Falls at Baltimore Street. At that time, Baltimore Street intersected the Philadelphia Road just east of the current Patterson Park Avenue and well east of the City line. Soon a small settlement — the beginnings of Butchers Hill — grew up around this intersection.

1810... (or earlier) Patterson leased a tract of hilltop land to Jacob Loudenslager, a butcher

and innkeeper. Until at least **1835**, the area was officially known as "Loudenslager's Hill." Dozens of butchers and tanners settled here, partly because the City forbade slaughterhouses southwest of Baltimore and Ann Streets.

1813-1814... Twice during the War of 1812, the British threatened the City. Baltimoreans constructed lines of breastworks extending for about a mile across Hampstead Hill. So formidable were these earthworks and their tens of thousands of defenders that the British withdrew — both times — without significantly engaging the Americans. In **1814**, the British loss at the Battle of North Point was as serious a blow as the simultaneous failure of their ships at Fort McHenry. Ironically, a *naval* captain, Commodore John Rodgers, commanded American land forces in **1814**. "Rodgers' Bastion" is a remnant of the earthworks where the Pagoda now stands

1816... A vigorous City extended its boundaries to East Street, thus taking in Hampstead Hill.

1822... Thomas Poppleton produced his famous survey and street plan of Baltimore. Streets forming a rigid grid were laid out and named by Poppleton in what was to be the City's urban plan until **1888**. The names of Castle, Chester, Duncan, Madeira and Washington Streets date from the plan, while Pratt, Lombard, and Baltimore are extensions of previously named downtown streets. Patterson Park Avenue was called "Gist Street" after Mordecai Gist, a revolutionary war general. Fairmont was then called "Great Hampstead Hill Street," and Collington was named "Choptank Street."

1826... Fred Bailey, an 8-year-old Talbot County slave, stepped off a sloop at Smith's Wharf with a flock of sheep, which he drove to the butchers on Loudenslager's Hill. Young Fred was to take up residence in Fells Point, strive and thrive in the heady give-and-take of the City, and make a name for himself as Frederick Douglass, one of the most illustrious of Baltimoreans.

1827... Recognizing the historic and scenic value of the Hill, William Patterson gave "two squares" (5-6 acres) to the City for use as a "public walk." This was the first public park land in Baltimore, the nucleus of the now 135-acre Patterson Park.

1858... Edward Sachse published his "Bird's Eye View of Baltimore," the largest such view ever produced in America. It shows buildings clustered along Baltimore, Collington, and Fairmount, relatively isolated from development to the south and west. Typical of pre-Civil War architecture are the houses at 2218 and 2232-2236 East Fairmount (**A**), built circa 1855. These structures are 2 bays wide

by 2½ stories high with gabled roofs. They are among the oldest in Butchers Hill. Sachse's "Birds Eye View" can be seen at the Maryland Historical Society. It shows several Butchers Hill buildings that were torn down and replaced.

1860-1866... When citizens rallied and petitioned for an enlarged Patterson Park, the City acquired land to expand it to 35 acres. But the Civil War intervened, and the land was used for Union encampments and military hospitals. After the War, the Boat Lake was dug, 2000 trees were planted at a cost of 75¢ each, grass was used to stabilize hill-sides, and fences were built to keep out cattle and hogs. The marble fountain and the Superintendent's House (the White House) (**B**) were built at the Lombard Street entrance. Yet much of the Park was still unimproved: -- one observer called it "a bare common intersected in many parts by great ravines."

Butchers on the Hill prospered during the war by supplying meat to the Union Army. One of these, Jacob J. Bankard, amassed a fortune and by **1866** had built the lavish residence and carriage house still standing at Baltimore and Chester Streets. (This grand mansion was purchased in **1891** by George Gunther, and is now known as the Bankard-Gunther (**C**) mansion.) This house began the 50-year heyday of Butchers Hill's major development between **1865** and **1915**.

II. A Wave of Urbanization — 1865-1915

For fifty years after the Civil war, intense development created most of what we now observe in our streetscapes. During this period, the name "Butchers Hill" was first applied. Here are some themes of this development. (All dates given are "circa," not exact.) — **R.G.**

Topography... Butchers Hill is literally at the crest of Hampstead Hill, with a high point at the flagpole in Patterson Park. The land slopes down rather steeply to the south and east, and more gently to the north. At the other end of the neighborhood, the land again slopes sharply to the west. This topography introduces pleasant "stair-step" adjustments in row-house façades, and also allows many houses to have so-called "English basements," with ground-level back yards one story below the front entrance level.

"Hopscotch" Development... Because there was already a thriving community on the Hill in 1865, development and redevelopment proceeded almost lot-by-lot. There are many single units and freestanding doubles, or duplexes, and a typical series of row houses is short, averaging about six units.

Much of the area, particularly the part northeast of Lombard and Washington Streets, is redevelopment. In **1850** the area contained freestanding homes and slaughterhouses belonging to butchers who had settled in the area. But these were nearly all demolished in the wave of urbanization that washed over Butchers Hill after **1865**. There is no documentation to show that any of the extant buildings in the community pre-date **1850**.

Main and Alley Streets... Although Butchers Hill follows Poppleton's street grid of **1822**, it interprets that grid as offering major east-west thoroughfares with less important north-south streets. (There are obvious exceptions.) This led to an early pattern of diversity on the Hill, with many smaller homes for working-class families. (It is not generally true that the smaller "alley" homes were built for servants.) Even today, Butchers Hill is proud of its diversity.

The most literal example of the "same but smaller" characteristic is the row of Brick Style houses at 2-8 South Collington Avenue (**D**) (1887), which were built concurrently with their larger models around the corner at 2121-2129 East Baltimore Street (**E**).

Of the larger houses on main thoroughfares, the grandest are the stand-alone mansions. These include the Bankard-Gunther Mansion (**C**) (1866) at 2102 E. Baltimore, the Rusk House (**F**) (1869) at 2000 E. Baltimore, the Snyder House (**G**) (1869) at 2226 E. Fairmount, the Gengagel-Wehr House (**H**) (1872) at 2100 E. Fairmount, and the Weiskittel House (**J**) (1873) at 1931 E. Pratt.

The last of the stand-alone corner houses to be built in Butchers Hill was the Athey House (**K**) (1912) at 100 S. Patterson Park. (This structure was redeveloped in 2005-2006.) Built for Doctor Caleb Athey, it had two entrances (home and office), one on each of the intersecting streets.

Among the earliest rows built speculatively for sale to single families is 2222-2228 E. Lombard (**L**) (1868). These units approach the scale of individual houses built by that date. The seven-house row at 2101-2113 E. Baltimore (**M**) (1876) is typical of development in Mount Vernon and Bolton Hill at the time -- Butchers Hill had made it in the speculative market!

Architecture... Not all architectural styles adapt well to rowhouses. Butchers Hill has a variety of formal and vernacular architectures, with Italianate strongly predominating. Yet there are also good examples of Federal, Greek Revival, Georgian Revival, and Romanesque styles. The unusual Brick Style pair at 2215-2217 E. Baltimore (**N**) (1890) exhibits a slate-shingled iron-crested false mansard, a cor-

belled brick oriel that rises to a wall dormer, and an ornamental carved sandstone relief panel.

Starting at 2229½ Baltimore Street (O) and turning the corner of Patterson Park Avenue is the outstanding Queen Anne “Bonaparte” block (1884). Designed by J. B. Noel Wyatt, these houses were developed by Charles Joseph Bonaparte, a great-grandson of William Patterson, and Teddy Roosevelt’s Attorney General.

Ground Rent... Rare outside Baltimore, Ground Rent had important consequences in Butchers Hill development. Because ground rent provided a continuous flow of revenue to the seller even after the sale, buildings could be constructed with low, even negative, profit margins. Much Victorian detailing in our houses owes its initial affordability to ground rent. Ground rent also made it possible for accomplished craftsmen to become general contractors. Financial risk was in effect transferred from builder to buyer.

Transportation... In 1892, building contractor Benjamin Glenn built and operated the Belmont Stables (P) at 2115-2117 E. Baltimore Street for those like himself, who had no carriage house. By then, street railways (trolleys) had been operating through Butchers Hill for 20 years. At least one rail line moved rapidly from horse-drawn cars to cheaper cable cars, to even cheaper electric units. It should not be surprising to learn that MTA buses currently follow some of these same trolley routes! The Citizens’ Passenger Railway carried passengers to Patterson Park and across town to Druid Park. By levying a 1¢ fee on each fare, the City funded many major improvements to both parks.

III. Change & Renaissance — The 20th Century

By 1915, Butchers Hill was fully built-up. Impelled by many social trends, the neighborhood began to change. Decline after World War II led eventually to renaissance beginning in the 1970s. — R.G.

Immigration... Baltimore was second only to Ellis Island as an entry point for immigrants. Some of them moved to the country’s interior, while others simply occupied existing housing in Baltimore. Census data show that many houses on Pratt Street, for example, were occupied by immigrant families as early as 1900. To accommodate the newcomers, owners moved to the suburbs and became absentee landlords. Immigrants brought with them vibrant energy and an enthusiasm for life in their new homes, but they typically had little money.

By 1925, the last of the butchers had moved, and the neighborhood populace was primarily immigrant. Between 1920 and 1940, the community was mainly the families of Jewish doctors, lawyers, dentists, tailors, rabbis, grocers, confectioners and barbers. Synagogues and social clubs were often set up in former residences, such as the Gengagel-Wehr House (H) at 2100 E. Fairmount. Other residences, like the Quinn House (Q) at 2243 E. Baltimore, were made over with storefronts. Harry Attman’s delicatessen was located in the Rusk house (F) at 2000 E. Baltimore for a time, and in 1919 the Bankard-Gunther (C) mansion became the Hebrew Mansion for incurables, later relocated to Levindale. In 1916, the Tzemach Sedek Nusach congregation built an Egyptian revival style Synagogue (R) at 2120 E. Fairmount. This building, now the Wilson Baptist Church, features a large star of David in its round stained glass window, and its interior was lit by rows of closely-spaced bare light bulbs.

World War II and its Aftermath... Because it was close to the large defense plants in southeast Baltimore City and County, Butchers Hill may have been hit harder by the war than other neighborhoods. Most large homes on the Hill were divided into apartments during the war, with some 3-story homes split into as many as 7 apartments. To capitalize on Baltimore as a center for clothing manufacture, spaces in homes and carriage houses were turned into high-volume sewing rooms for both hand and machine needlework. Not only were buildings used more intensely, but maintenance also suffered. The fabric of structure and infrastructure began to fray, and physical decline set in.

After the war, housing development proceeded apace in the suburbs, but languished in the City. Jewish families moved from Butchers Hill to northwestern Baltimore City and the nearby county, to be replaced by disadvantaged incomers, largely from Appalachia. In the 1950s, vandalism caused the loss of major buildings in Patterson Park, while declining City finances left little money for maintenance.

Renaissance... In 1976, an innovative housing rehabilitation program was set in motion in Butchers Hill. This program was formulated by the Southeast Land Bank (a part of the Southeast Community Organization) and spurred by \$600,000 from the Ford Foundation. Initial programs were aimed largely at “urban pioneers” who could be enticed to move into the city from other city neighborhoods or the suburbs. Veterans of these pioneering days recall such adventures as moving rented scaffolding from house to house to imply more rebuilding than there actually was.

Since that time, Butchers Hill has had millions of dollars of private investment. Most rehabilitation

activity to date has been sensitive to the historic character of the Hill. The 100 homes that were purchased and resold by the Southeast Land Bank typically carried protective exterior covenants in their deeds. With that base, later owners and developers have recognized and rein

forced the unique architectural character of the neighborhood. The area was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in the early 1980s, and several blocks are City Historical Districts (CHAP Districts), by request of the owners

The Butchers Hill Association... has been active from the 1970s. We have conducted annual House Tours, published a monthly Newsletter, and held monthly meetings for more than a quarter century.

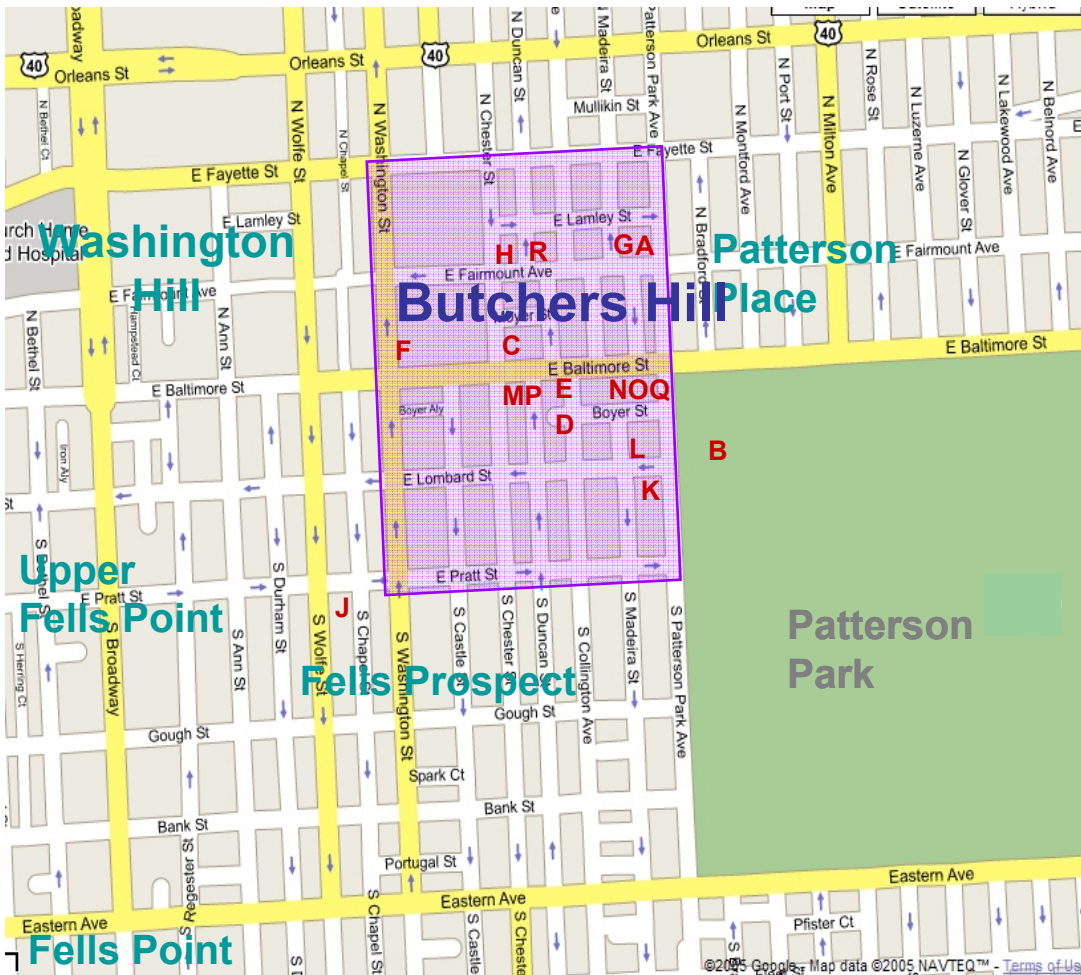
We have bagged, begged, biked, cajoled, climbed, coached, computed, contributed, cooked, created, debated, demonstrated, distributed, dug, dumped, hammered, learned, lectured, lobbied, marched, met, painted, partied, performed, petitioned, picked up, planted, published, rallied, raked, read, run,

sawed, scraped, scrubbed, shoveled, stapled, stuffed, talked, taught, telephoned, volunteered, voted, welded, and written to build our community.

Everything the Butchers Hill Association achieves comes from volunteers. Be one — get involved in your neighborhood association!

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- A Pre-Civil War
- B White House
- C Gunther Mansion
- D Smaller Brick Style
- E Larger Brick Style
- F Rusk House
- G Snyder House
- H Gengagel-Wehr House
- J Weiskittel House
- K Athey House
- L Early Speculation Row
- M Later Speculation Row
- N Brick Style Pair
- O Queen Anne Block
- P Belmont Stables
- Q Quinn House
- R Tzernach Sedek Nusach Synagogue